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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Chatham-Kent—Essex.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we see the same bad decision making from the current Liberal leader as we did from his predecessor. In 2007 the now rejected Liberal leader broke his promise by accepting back into the party, Marc-Yvan Côté, who had been banned for life for his involvement in the sponsorship scandal. Fast forward to today: new leader, same flip-flops. Beryl Wajzman was one of 10 Liberals banned for life for his involvement in the sponsorship scandal, yet he is now reinstated as an adviser to the Liberal leader. Apparently four years is a lifetime for the Liberals.

While the Liberals have forgiven the transgressions of their cronies, I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, Canadians have not.

Let me quote from the *Guardian*, a newspaper in the U.K. This is a description of the Liberal leader:

—a chameleon, a shifty academic difficult to pin down, but perhaps more accurately he ought to be called an egotist who is sure of his own superiority and who seems to lack any real passion for the country he intends to lead.

When will the Liberal Party learn that Canadians do not want to go back to the days of scandals, flip-flops and hypocrisy? Why does the Liberal leader love to flip-flop? When will the Liberals find real leadership?

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN DOWNHILL SKI TEAM

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start my speech by stating that I understand Canadians' enthusiasm for hockey. I like hockey.

[*English*]

I like hockey players just as much as the next guy.

[*Translation*]

But as a former skier, I am proud to draw attention today to the success of Canada's downhill ski team in the world championships.

[*English*]

Recently in France, a young Canadian, John Kucera, became the first Canadian man to become world downhill ski champion.

A week later, still at the world championships, another young Canadian, Michael Janyk, won the bronze medal in the slalom, the first Canadian man to win a medal in a world championship tech event.

[*Translation*]

None of these young skiers is from my riding, but I am well aware, from experience and knowledge of the downhill ski community, of how important these championships are and how much effort goes into a win.

[*English*]

I ask the House to join me in congratulating these young Canadians and to wish the entire national ski team, men and women, the best of success for the rest of the season.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JENNIFER CRAWFORD

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 12, Jennifer Crawford, a resident of Napierville in my riding, was selected the first winner of the Yves Rocher foundation Terre des Femmes award, which recognizes women committed to the environment.

Ms. Crawford is the director of Cyclo Nord-Sud, which was set up ten years ago to collect unused bicycles. These are then repaired and sent to NGOs in a dozen or so countries in Africa and South America. These bikes have an average of 20 years more use left in them and will go through another five owners.

Statements by Members

My colleagues in the Bloc Québécois and I are delighted to draw attention to the work done by Ms. Crawford and to congratulate her on this award.

* * *

[English]

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise with more sadness and concern than I have experienced in my 20 years in elected public office and my 30 years of fighting for women's equality.

Yesterday the Liberals gave a blank cheque to the Conservatives to kill pay equity. They sold out their principles. They let down the women of Canada. They decided to sacrifice pay equity on the altar of political expediency.

Pay equity goes to the heart of equality, human rights and civil liberties in this country. Equal pay for work of equal value is a fundamental right in Canada, and when that right has been denied, there has always been the option to seek justice through the courts. No more. That fundamental right is now gone with the Conservatives.

We fought for and won this battle decades ago, with the Manitoba NDP government under Howard Pawley being the first government in Canada to legislate pay equity, to proactively implement it while maintaining the human rights complaint mechanism.

For Conservative hack Tom Flanagan to compare women's rights to polyester leisure suits is beyond insulting. It is discriminatory, sexist and misogynist.

I say to the Conservatives that they should publicly renounce these offensive comments and stop their attack on women.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I announced the construction of a new airport terminal for Red Lake-Balmertown as part of this government's building Canada fund, working with provincial and municipal governments as equal partners in modernizing our country with greener infrastructure.

I spent a lot of time travelling through Red Lake over the years as a nurse on my way to isolated first nations communities. I know how important this airport is to the region.

This will be no ordinary airport. It will feature a ground-sourced thermal heating and cooling system. That means no chimney, no fossil fuel and no environmental footprint.

In fact, Red Lake-Balmertown's seniors home, schools, library and municipal office are all geothermally heated and cooled. Improved air quality has made a difference in the overall health of seniors and increased attendance in schools by teachers and students. In Red Lake fossil fuels are fossil age.

Congratulations to Red Lake-Balmertown for being environmentally responsible. Hopefully more communities across Canada will

embrace the concept that when it comes to constructing public buildings: no fossil fuels required, no fossil fuels desired.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, each year, communities across Canada mark the month of February as Black History Month. This year several students at Senator O'Connor College School in my riding of Don Valley East organized a month of activities dedicated specifically to the history of the African diaspora in Canada.

The organizing committee, consisting of Marie Emmanuel, Trisha Henson, Dominique Bennett, Shendel Shand, Nikeisha Noel and Amisah Williams, have chosen themes for their month of activities including, "Deliverance From Ignorance", "Marking History Books" and "Hallway of Heroes".

I congratulate Marie, Trisha, Dominique, Shendel, Nikeisha and Amisah for their efforts to celebrate the contributions of Canadians of African heritage. I hope they achieve their goals of educating colleagues and classmates.

Also, tomorrow, students from across Toronto will be in Ottawa for the annual Toronto Breakfast Club Black History Month poster presentation. I invite all parliamentarians to attend.

* * *

● (1410)

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak about a very disturbing event that is happening in my riding.

On January 26 the Local Health Integrated Network, LHIN, released the results of a study it commissioned on three rural emergency departments. The study recommended the status quo at one, the closure of one and the downgrading of another to an urgent care centre. These recommendations, if implemented, would greatly decrease the quality of health care in my riding. The report's conclusions were determined by faulty data and are in direct contradiction with the recommendations of a previous report.

The community is outraged at LHIN's attack on health services. Thousands have attended rallies, written letters and made phone calls.

The results to date are that LHIN has refused to budge from its position. Meanwhile, six doctors have given notice they will leave in June if there is no emergency department.

Is this the future we can expect for rural health care in Ontario? Not if I can help it. Keep working together, Sarnia—Lambton. Hopefully together we will make a difference and convince the LHIN that we deserve health care.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

MOTION NO. 299

Mr. Nicolas Dufour (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Motion No 299 by the hon. member for Papineau is in large part inspired by Katimavik, of which he has been chairman of the board. It reflects the same aim as that organization: the introduction in Canada of a national voluntary service policy for young people, which is nothing more or less than just one more intrusion into Quebec's areas of jurisdiction.

That said, it is not surprising for a motion that is just one more intrusion by the Liberals and federalists to come from the member for Papineau. It is an intrusion into the areas of education and manpower training, to name but a few. Education is clearly solely a Quebec jurisdiction.

Quebec already has its own youth action strategy. It also has programs for student exchanges with other provinces, as well as programs through which young people can gain volunteer experience in Quebec, in Canada, and abroad.

For the Bloc Québécois, it is absolutely clear that supporting this federalist propaganda measure is totally out of the question.

* * *

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is creating jobs and building Canada.

In my riding of Perth—Wellington, nine infrastructure projects were recently approved for a total of \$24.3 million in spending. These are just some of the 289 projects across the province that will soon break ground, thanks to a federal-provincial-municipal investment of more than \$1 billion.

Less than one month after the budget, our government is working with our partners at all levels to get funding out the door. This major injection of infrastructure funding will benefit the province of Ontario which has been hit especially hard by the global economic downturn.

With more than \$24 million in infrastructure projects about to go ahead in my riding, I want to thank our provincial and municipal partners and especially our government for creating jobs in Perth—Wellington.

* * *

ANTI-BULLYING DAY

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I first became aware of how serious bullying can be from Ms. Nasima Nastoh who lost her son to an act of bullying in his high school. Like many other children, he lived in fear because he knew he was thought of as different.

All of us at one time in our lives have been singled out, but for some kids bullying has become so serious that being attacked or assaulted is a daily risk.

Today, on February 25, wearing pink means that we stand united against bullying in our schools and workplaces.

* * *

[Translation]

LEADER OF THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc has, for some weeks now, implicitly sanctioned hateful and violent remarks made by a group of extremists that was denouncing the re-enactment of the battle of the Plains of Abraham this summer in Quebec City.

In doing so, the Leader of the Bloc Québécois has made a serious error in judgment. His lengthy silence in response to the hateful remarks, notably by Pierre Falardeau and Patrick Bourgeois, is completely unacceptable.

But this kind of attitude from the Bloc leader was predictable given that his top priority is to divide Quebecers, as the French president so eloquently noted last month.

What is even more unacceptable is that, as a result, the Quebec City area, my area, has to kiss millions of dollars in tourism revenue goodbye.

In the midst of an economic crisis, the Bloc leader decided to play partisan politics to the detriment of the economic interests of the citizens and businesses in my city.

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the human rights critic for the NDP, I am concerned with the direction Canada has taken over the past number of years in regard to human rights both in Canada and abroad.

The United Nations Human Rights Council recently released a draft report on the Universal Periodic Review of Canada's human rights record. A disturbing thread that runs through the review is that Canada talks a good game, but we are not advancing human rights in Canada and internationally as Canadians believe their government should do.

Countries are asking why Canada is avoiding its responsibility to ratify the Optional Protocols of the Convention Against Torture. With the results of the O'Connor inquiry in the Maher Arar case and the Iacobucci review of Abdullah Almalki case and others, we know now that Canada, at the very least, has been complicit in torture by proxy.

Just who is responsible for ensuring that the recommendations coming from these reports and reviews are given proper consideration? Who is accountable for their implementation?

Canada has so much more to do. Other countries like China and Sudan give lip service to human rights. When will Canada once again—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Crowfoot.

*Oral Questions***THE ECONOMY**

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has a plan, a plan for its country, a plan for its people, a plan that is working. It is a plan that puts ordinary Canadians first, a plan with tax cuts for low and middle-income Canadians, extended EI benefits for the unemployed, a plan of investments in real projects that will create real jobs.

The Leader of the Opposition can muse and pontificate all he wants about the economy, but everyone knows he has no plan. The only substantive economic idea he has ever proposed was a carbon tax, a carbon tax far deeper and far more sweeping than the carbon tax proposed by his former leader, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville. One other thing he wants to form is another parliamentary committee to study it.

I have spent a lot of time talking to ordinary people and business leaders and the only two people in the country who remain wedded to a job killing, recession worsening, carbon tax are the Leader of the Opposition and his former leader.

* * *

[Translation]

THE NATIONAL POST

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the *National Post* demonstrated utter contempt by publishing a hostile editorial directed at Quebec.

The editorial called on Ottawa to adopt a tough-love attitude toward Quebec and suggested that the Quebec chair at the Organisation internationale de la francophonie be taken away. It urged politicians to state unequivocally that there is no fiscal imbalance between Quebec and Ottawa. It also suggested that the government reinstate the re-enactment of the battle of the Plains of Abraham and, if need be, provide federal security for the event.

More outrageous still, in the same issue of the daily paper, the Conservative member for Edmonton East added his own fuel to the fire when he said that, without the battle of the Plains, a pivotal point in history, French in Quebec today would probably be like it is in Louisiana: a quaint cultural tourist attraction and possibly not even an official language.

It is a shame that the Conservative members and ministers from Quebec did not have the wherewithal to explain just how tactless the re-enactment—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga South.

* * *

[English]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, accountability requires that one explain and justify one's actions and decisions in a manner that is true, full and plain. However, transparency and accountability seem to be just words to the current government.

Let us consider the following: ignoring its own fixed election date law; squandering a \$14 billion annual surplus; breaking its promise

not to tax income trusts; failing to spend nearly half of the approved infrastructure funding for 2008; the incompetent November economic statement; breaking its promise on equalization; voting non-confidence in Elections Canada.

The latest revelation is that within the government there is systemic abuse of the Access to Information Act by the Conservatives withholding of thousands of documents from the public and with the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office being directly involved by vetting the information before it is released.

It is time for this litany of unaccountability to stop. It is time for the government to put the interests of the public ahead of its own political interests.

Finally, it is time for the government to start respecting the laws of Canada.

* * *

● (1420)

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, whereas this government has a plan for the country, the Leader of the Opposition only has a plan for himself. He has the audacity to come back to Canada after 36 lost years for the sole purpose of becoming prime minister. The more he tours, the more he speaks, the more profiles that are written, Canadians are increasingly realizing that he is in it for himself and not for them.

The Guardian writer summed it best, and these are his words not mine, when he said that the Leader of the Opposition is so “sure of his own superiority and seems to lack any real passion for the country he intends to lead”.

For the Leader of the Opposition, Canadians deserve better.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, retail sales are plummeting, personal bankruptcies are rising and Canadians are losing their jobs in record numbers. They need to hear a message of hope and confidence.

Last night in Washington, Americans heard that message.

Here all the Minister of Finance can say is that the numbers “will continue to deteriorate”.

Is this all the government can offer our country, the spectacle of synchronized deterioration?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since we presented the latest steps in our economic plan, I have been in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. I will be in Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Our ministers and our members of Parliament have been making announcements across the country, which are giving hope to communities and families.

Oral Questions

In fact, I think the government is doing such a good job of selling this plan that the Leader of the Opposition has voted for it.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem is whether the Prime Minister actually believes what he is doing, because behind closed doors he is singing a different tune.

We know from Rick Anderson, the well-known Conservative insider, that the Prime Minister is quoted as saying that his own stimulus package is “over the top”.

Does the Prime Minister actually believe in his action plan?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not think I have had a conversation with Mr. Anderson for some years, so he certainly is not quoting me.

I can appreciate that the Leader of the Opposition is very concerned about how the stimulus plan is being sold in the United States. In fact, he is so concerned I notice that he rented some advertising space in New York and Las Vegas to put pictures of himself and Barack Obama up for the American public.

I can assure him that President Obama can sell his plan all by himself.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I saw the Prime Minister walking through Times Square to make up the lost ground.

[Translation]

In Washington yesterday, the President gave Americans a sense of hope and confidence, but here, the Minister of Finance is telling Canadians that our economy will “continue to deteriorate”.

What does the Prime Minister think? What is he offering Canadians? Continued deterioration?

[English]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition will know, around the visit of President Obama, Canada received very good publicity in the United States and this government did not have to pay for it.

[Translation]

When I visited the United States, I saw the difficulties they are having, just as we too are experiencing difficulties. The Americans are very impressed by Canada's position. That is why we have a more optimistic atmosphere here, but we must work together to improve our situation during these tough economic times.

• (1425)

[English]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Around the world business leaders are indicating that the key issue for them is credit. Last night the President of the United States repeated this point when he said that the lifeblood of the new economy was credit.

Could the Minister of Finance please explain to us why there is no reference to this question and why did the government not deal with this question in Bill C-10?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is Canada's economic plan. It is over 500 pages, and the party opposite is going to support it.

It includes the extraordinary financing framework, where we will use the crown corporations, where we will deal with the most important problem facing Canadians today, which is access to credit.

I am glad the member opposite has the wisdom to support the plan to help Canadians.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister can bluster or indeed move over as far as he wants in talking to it. It will have no effect.

The simple fact of the matter is that in the survey of business, which was contained in *The Globe and Mail* on Monday, the universal view of business leaders was very clear. That universal view was their main concern, their principal preoccupation, was the absence of credit. It is the lack of credit which is choking our system.

The simple question is this. Why are the credit measures that he talks about, that he blusters about and throws in front of us, not contained in Bill C-10?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member belongs to a party that has no economic plan.

This is the economic plan for Canada. I invite the member for Toronto Centre to read from pages 78 to 95. He will read all about how we will provide access to credit for Canadians families, for Canadian businesses, for Canadian entrepreneurs.

He should read the budget. It is a great read. He will want to support it even more after he has read it.

* * *

[Translation]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages could not say enough about the Canada Prizes for the Arts and Creativity, stating, and I quote: “This is a great project that will help unify our country.” On Tuesday, when questioned in the House about what he had said, the heritage minister denied having made the statement and even had a new version for us.

I am sure the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages tells us the truth one time in two. The question is when he told the truth. Did he tell the truth on Monday or on Tuesday?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are developing world-class prizes for the arts community. The only truth is that the Bloc Québécois will vote against any policy that benefits this country's cultural community.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister would be a great act at the Just for Laughs festival.

Oral Questions

Yesterday, as the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages was telling the House he was investing more in culture, the Minister of Finance surprised me by shouting abuse at me and saying that making cuts to culture was a political choice because we were in a recession and cuts had to be made somewhere.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his cuts to culture are having a disastrous effect on an economic sector that was doing fairly well up to now and was creating thousands of jobs in Quebec?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, this government has made choices. The fact is that overall, this government is spending more on culture than any government in the history of this country. With its ideology, the Bloc Québécois is voting against any measure to help the artistic community during a global recession. That is an ideological and irresponsible position.

• (1430)

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, from Japan to Belgium, no less than 23 arts promoters from 17 countries have written to the Prime Minister, asking that his government reinstate assistance programs that allow Quebec and Canadian artists to tour abroad. The Prime Minister has not even bothered to acknowledge receipt of the letters.

Will the Prime Minister respond to the arguments of these international promoters who are confirming how effective those programs are and re-establish the funding for those programs?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this budget provides \$22 million in funding this year to help our artists on the international stage. Every time, it is the Bloc Québécois that votes against our artists. This year, we will spend \$2.3 billion to support our artists. It is always the Bloc members who vote against this.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages is suggesting that the support programs for touring abroad are a waste.

President Obama, however, is showing transparency by promising that his entire stimulus package will be published on the Internet.

Why is the minister still refusing to make public the studies that triggered the elimination of those programs, unless the studies' findings do not justify their actions?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc Québécois talked about the Just for Laughs Festival. Here is what Gilbert Rozon, the founder of Just for Laughs, said: "By integrating arts and culture along with major events in his crisis policy, the Prime Minister recognizes the role that this sector plays in the national economy."

We are the ones who deliver the goods for Canadian artists. It is the Bloc members who vote against them.

[English]

JUSTICE

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, frightened families in Abbotsford, Langley, Surrey, Vancouver and throughout the lower mainland are concerned that they are being held hostage by gangland violence.

What we need is a comprehensive anti-gang strategy. To be sure, we need tougher sentences for gang killings and drive-by shootings, but we also need witness protection. We need to have electronic surveillance and prevention to keep our kids away from gangs in the first place.

Can these families look forward to the Prime Minister tabling in the House a serious and comprehensive plan to deal with gang violence? Can we see that so we can discuss it?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the leader of the NDP will know, this government has made tackling crime at all levels a major priority, whether it is toughening sentences or investing in programs for youth at risk. That is why the people of Canada deserve an opposition that will actually look at these measures before deciding it will vote against them without even reading them, like the NDP does.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a member of the current government said, "...we are pleased that the NDP is keeping its campaign commitment to get tougher on serious gun crimes". The current Minister of Justice said, "The NDP, quite frankly, and I'm sure they'll tell you, they continue to support us on" these measures. The fact is that we have been supporting these initiatives.

My question is for the Prime Minister again. We need a comprehensive plan. I think British Columbians and the people of Canada know that we need certain laws made tougher but they also know that we need to focus on prevention and deterrence and it needs to all fit together in a comprehensive plan. When will we see that?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course we will pursue all of these matters. When these bills come before the House of Commons, I hope the NDP will not just say that it supports them but that it will actually assist us to pass them through committee instead of delaying them for months and months on end as it did in the previous Parliament.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is well-known that the NDP assisted in the passage of some of those bills. Unfortunately, when they were ready to be passed into law, prorogation came along, initiated by the government. We would have had those laws today.

Crime is a concern throughout Canada. One challenge that the RCMP is facing is recruitment. Why, then, would the government aggravate the important work of recruiting new RCMP officers by demoralizing the RCMP officers by rolling back their salaries at a time when they had already been granted wage increases and they were making plans for their families? The budget bill rolls back the salaries of RCMP officers. Why is the government doing that and making it more difficult to—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

*Oral Questions***AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY**

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House will know that the government has treated all public servants equally in the matter of compensation.

It is interesting to hear the leader of the NDP attempting to blame the non-passage of legislation on prorogation. Prorogation was after Parliament had been sitting for three years. That is not our definition of quick action. That is why the NDP and the other opposition parties should stop blocking tough on crime legislation.

* * *

• (1435)

[*Translation*]

PAY EQUITY

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, women have been brushed aside by this government. Canada now ranks 83rd on the gender equality index. Women earn only 70¢ for each dollar earned by men, and the recession is serving only to widen the gap. Yet this government is doing nothing.

Why is the government sitting on its hands instead of helping women during the recession? Why?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2004 the Liberals put in place a task force stating that they wanted proactive, comprehensive, pay equity legislation.

This government is bringing that legislation forward. They did not do it. We are getting the job down.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government is trying to use pay equity to abolish human rights.

[*English*]

The Conservative government's much touted infrastructure plan ignores women, especially working women.

Can anyone guess how much of the Conservatives' infrastructure spending plan goes toward building child care space facilities? Zero. All this on the heels of a UN report that blasts Canada for its failure to publicly fund child care spaces.

Why is the Conservative government refusing to help women—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for starters, we believe that both parents are responsible for raising a child. Our government has done more to assist with child care than that government ever did.

We launched the universal child care benefit to provide both parents with the choice as to where and how their young child is raised and we provided over \$250 million to the provinces that have already created over 60,000 child care spaces so that parents have that choice available to them as well.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, auto workers and manufacturers who supply parts to the auto sector need leadership and they are not getting it from the government.

We have a year old innovation fund that has failed to launch, a federal adviser who took a close at his team and quit, and a government that twiddled its thumbs, attacked Ontario while tens of thousands of jobs were under serious threat and it still does not have a plan.

Will the government simply admit that it needs help? Will it support the creation of a subcommittee on the auto industry so we can finally get help to the thousands who have been waiting?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we tend to be accountable to this Parliament and to the people of Canada, and that does not change.

I would note for the hon. member that the industry committee met two weeks ago. I met with them for two hours. I received 18 questions from the Liberal MPs on that committee and only one question was on the auto sector.

It appears that the Liberal plan is money for nothing, no terms, no accountability and no conditions. We all know that money for nothing leads to dire straits.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 2009 is already turning out to be a record and none of them good.

January saw the biggest decline in sales in over 15 years, two-thirds of this in the auto sector, and 100,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost.

In communities across Ontario, auto parts suppliers are closing their doors for good and jobs are being lost.

The new U.S. administration has taken decisive action but the government refuses to act. When will the government speak up for our Canadian workers, show leadership and act now?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, well before the current president was inaugurated, our Prime Minister, along with Dalton McGuinty, the Ontario premier, announced our plans to work with the auto sector in Canada.

In conjunction with the U.S. government, we are working on those plans. We are making sure that our terms and conditions are met because we do not believe in money for nothing, unlike the party on the other side.

Oral Questions

●(1440)

*[Translation]***NATIONAL BATTLEFIELDS COMMISSION**

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on its website, the National Battlefields Commission offers the opportunity, under the guise of an educational activity, for primary school students to enlist as a member of the militia, play war and participate in thrilling military manoeuvres.

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages tell us why the National Battlefields Commission is conducting educational activities in schools, activities which clearly fall under Quebec's jurisdiction?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we want, as everyone does, is for all events surrounding the 250th anniversary to be educational and respectful.

My colleague knows that this afternoon, in about one hour, the President of the National Battlefields Commission will appear before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. My colleague can ask him these questions.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in light of the National Battlefield Commission's lack of judgment, would it not be advisable for the minister to remind him that its mandate does not include using children to re-enact wars and the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, as proposed on its website?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will simply repeat that it is important to us that the events commemorating the 250th anniversary be respectful and educational.

André Juneau, chairman of the National Battlefields Commission, will appear before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage this afternoon and my colleague can address his questions to him.

* * *

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in committee, the Canadian Labour Congress came out strongly against the government's approach to pay equity. Far from solving the problem, the proposed program is evidence that the government is trying to rein in the unions rather than help women.

Can the Conservative government at last admit that it is on the wrong track with this? What is it waiting for before passing real, proactive legislation on pay equity as proposed in the report of the pay equity task force?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the first proactive pay equity legislation was introduced in Manitoba in 1986. It was followed by Ontario and Quebec. The member for Toronto Centre had a great deal to do with the implementation of that legislation in Ontario.

We are simply following the recommendations of the Liberal task force in 2004 that said proactive pay equity legislation was needed.

Women should not have to wait for 15 or 20 years in order to have their complaints resolved.

We are getting the job done.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the proposed system includes threatening unions with a fine of \$50,000 if they encourage people to file a complaint. As well, it bans individual and class grievances and makes the fundamental right to fair pay negotiable. In short, it is a real mess.

Will the government admit that the bill is aimed far more at weakening unions than at helping women?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, employers have a responsibility to ensure that pay equity is implemented in the workforce. Unions have a responsibility. That will be done in a proactive way with two parties cooperating to ensure that women achieve pay equity in the workforce.

This is not just an issue of women's rights. This is an issue of family rights to ensure that families have appropriate income and that people are taken care of properly.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the Conservative government's watch, Vancouver has had 18 murders in the last 30 days. The government has not provided the police officers or the prosecutors that it promised, nor has it paid much attention to planned prevention.

Canadians feel less safe today than they did three years ago. Canadians are legitimately angry at the government for not providing them with protection and for not making Canada safer. Why should they not be angry?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the Liberal Party fails to realize is that fighting crime is not a sometime thing, a flavour of the week issue. It is something that needs to be done all the time.

It is like in the recent election when the Liberals spent about two minutes talking about fighting crime. I said then and I will say it again that we need help fighting crime between elections and we never get that from the Liberal Party.

We will be holding the Liberals accountable in the House when we bring in justice legislation and, more important, we will make sure Canadians hold them accountable.

●(1445)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not a flavour of the week. For three years the Conservatives have been promising to stop violent gun crime and increase the number of police in metro Vancouver. They failed to do it.

Oral Questions

My neighbours are now afraid to leave their homes because of gun violence by gangs in Vancouver. In three years the situation has worsened. Greater Vancouver is in a state of crisis with 18 murders in the last month.

Why did the government fail to protect the people of Vancouver?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hope the hon. member will indicate to her constituents that she and her colleagues voted against our mandatory jail terms for people who commit serious gun crimes.

I am pleased to be in the presence of those born again crime fighters. We will be introducing legislation and we will see if their new-found enthusiasm holds up. I know, according to the Liberal record, that will be very difficult.

I do not think we have any choice but to place the Liberals on probation on this issue.

* * *

[*Translation*]

LA FRANCOPHONIE

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister for La Francophonie may be asleep at the switch once again. Her colleague, the Minister of International Cooperation, has cut off funding for a number of African countries who are our partners within the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

What explanation is the Minister for La Francophonie going to give to our colleagues in Rwanda, Niger, Burkina Faso, Benin and all the other countries now excluded from priority bilateral aid from Canada?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, we have in fact increased our support for the Francophonie. The Francophonie receives 20% of all of CIDA's aid.

Also, for the African countries, we are doubling our aid to Africa. In fact, at this particular time 62% of our food aid goes to African countries, almost 45% of our total aid budget goes to African countries, and 55% of our agricultural support goes to African countries.

We are responding to the needs of Africa and the Francophonie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we want to know is what role the Minister for La Francophonie played? Was she consulted when those four countries were struck from the list? Did she give her blessing to the abandonment of all those African countries with which we have a special relationship through La Francophonie?

I would hate to think she was asleep at the switch while her colleague was giving the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie a slap in the face. Where was the minister?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a responsible government takes into consideration all of the responsibilities that the Government of Canada has. We took into consideration our responsibilities not only to those in need but our responsibilities to the Francophonie, to Commonwealth countries, and to other donor partners that we have around the world. We work as one voice and one government.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has consistently demonstrated its commitment to women. The Prime Minister appointed the largest percentage of women to cabinet in the history of Canada. He appointed the first minister of state solely responsible for the Status of Women.

This morning the Minister of State for the Status of Women made an exciting announcement. Could the minister please tell the House about the work she is continuing to do for women?

Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her work on this important file.

Next week is International Women's Week, culminating in International Women's Day on March 8. This year's poster theme, which we unveiled today, is "Strong Leadership. Strong Women. Strong World: Equality". It clearly underscores our government's record on supporting and protecting women.

With Status of Women funding at its highest level, support for Sisters in Spirit, an end to house arrest for violent sexual crimes, our government is committed to the full participation of women in the economic, social and democratic life of Canada.

I encourage all members to come together to celebrate and recognize the enormous contributions of all women.

* * *

● (1450)

[*Translation*]

INDUSTRY

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, a Belgian brewer sold Labatt's U.S. division to an American buyer. As part of the deal, Labatt will not be allowed to export its Canadian-made beer to the United States, which represents 20% of the company's market.

Labatt was once a jewel in our economic crown. Now this takeover by foreign interests will end in the loss of Canadian jobs.

Considering how little respect some foreign owners have for jobs here in Canada, why did the Conservatives use their budget to make this kind of takeover easier?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we always review these kinds of requests for takeover with a net benefit to Canada test. I would be happy to look into the matter. I was not in charge at that particular moment, but I can tell the hon. member that through the changes we are pursuing via the budget implementation act, we will continue to make sure that Canada's national security and national interests are well protected.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Labatt is already speaking job cuts and plant closures, a direct result of a foreign takeover. Another example is Xstrata in Sudbury, where despite a government agreement to keep jobs for three years, 700 families are now out of work.

In the Conservative budget bill, thanks to the support of the spineless Liberals, the Conservatives have made it even easier for foreign companies to take over Canadian gems and export jobs, because they are weakening the Canadian Investment Act.

If the Canadian government does not care about our own workers and will not lift a finger to protect their jobs, why should a foreign owner?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, there are protections that are contained in the budget implementation bill that are still there for us to review certain transactions and to defend national security, but I want to make a larger point.

The larger point is that we on this side of the House believe that Canada, in order to survive and thrive, must be open for investment, must be open for new jobs and new opportunities, not only from indigenous businesses but also the ones from overseas who want to invest in Canada, invest in jobs, and invest in opportunity.

That is why we are the government for investment, for the fact that we can grow jobs and opportunity, and why those members sit in the opposition.

* * *

*[Translation]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is responsible for international treaties to which Canada is a party, is refusing to demand the repatriation of Omar Khadr, the child soldier being held in Guantanamo and the only westerner still imprisoned there.

Since the Minister of Foreign Affairs is responsible for Canada's signature at the bottom of the protocol on child soldiers, can he provide us with the definition of a child soldier?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I refuse to agree to the request submitted by the Bloc Québécois and the other two parties for the simple reason that the individual concerned has been formally accused of serious crimes. I have already said so several times here in the House. The Americans have begun the process, which we will respect, and once the process is done, we will act accordingly.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, all of the countries that have signed treaties regarding child soldiers are keeping their promises. All but Canada, that is. The minister has not given a straight answer, so I will ask the question again.

What is his definition of a child soldier? As Canada's representative, will he keep this country's word?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, Canada is keeping its promises, keeping its word and adhering to its treaties. Unfortunately, the member seems to be having some trouble understanding that this individual has been accused of serious crimes. He has been charged with murder and terrorism. He is in American hands, and they will take appropriate action in accordance with the review ordered by the President of the United States.

* * *

*[English]***AGRICULTURE**

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadian livestock producers are facing unprecedented financial trouble and this week their problem got a whole lot worse. The U.S. agriculture secretary has just relaunched the issue of country of origin labelling. In three weeks, he will impose new labelling rules that are directly anti-Canadian. The Conservatives previously claimed this to be their one trade policy success. Now, that is all blown to smithereens.

Will they now relaunch Canada's WTO challenge on labelling, which they abandoned in January?

● (1455)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, livestock industries on both sides of the border are concerned about what is being proposed. We were able to argue with the former administration for a better set of rules. Those are the ones being implemented. The Americans will seek to do some voluntary assessments of that, but let me quote Brad Wildeman, the president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, in regard to the challenge. He says, "We have no doubt the federal government will continue to deliver strong action to oppose any unfair implementation of COOL".

We will certainly do that.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Mr. Wildeman knows, talk is cheap from this government.

Country of origin labelling is blatant trade protectionism. It is all the more disappointing coming only days after President Obama's visit. This could spell the end for many Canadian livestock producers. They are already selling off their breeding stock and sacrificing their futures. Canada needs to fight this on all fronts, industry to industry, province to state, administration to administration, MPs to senators and congressmen, Prime Minister to President.

Why is there no full-scale plan to fight country of origin labelling?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where the member opposite has been, but I am sure that on his flights to Florida he has read the American media that is giving us tremendous credit for fighting country of origin labelling, to actually getting through the changes that are being asked for by industry on both sides of the border.

Let me quote Brad Wildeman again. He says, "We have no doubt the federal government will continue to deliver strong action to oppose any unfair implementation of COOL".

We will certainly do that. I wish the member would get on side with us.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, government documents reveal that when the Minister of Indian Affairs walked away from negotiations to build a school in Attawapiskat, the Ontario region had identified three key priorities, Wabaseemoong, North Spirit Lake and Attawapiskat, all because of serious health and safety concerns, and in the case of Attawapiskat overcrowding and badly deteriorated portables.

Yet, the minister told Canadians there was no evidence of any health and safety problems whatsoever. The documents reveal a campaign of misinformation to cover his tracks.

What was the minister's real reason for walking away from the children of Attawapiskat and the commitments made to build that school?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have never, well I should not say that, I have heard such a load of claptrap in my life, but not recently, as I have from this member.

Here is what we know for sure. This is the member, who when he was a member of the coalition, a member of the coalition that was going to sneak into power, said that when it comes to building a native school in Attawapiskat, he could not make that kind of commitment as part of the coalition.

Why? Because he knows full well that this is the government that committed, in its recent budget, to build 10 new schools, major renovations around the country. We are building schools for first nations. He is voting against it. He is a glory seeker and that is all he is.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was absolutely shameful. He is trolling through reports.

Oral Questions

Let us be very clear on their record. When the head of capital planning for Indian Affairs Canada was asked to provide an update on the schools in crisis and why they were not going ahead, he stated that there was no real reason holding up the money other than the fact that they were in opposition ridings.

It should not matter what ridings they were in. What should matter is that these were the most desperately poor substandard educational facilities in North America.

What steps will the minister take to take responsibility for the fact that he—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the evidence is already in. This member of Parliament is a shameless self-promoter who will take publicity based on the backs of needy aboriginal people.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am not sure the words used by the minister were out of order, but I think it is unnecessary to make personal references in either questions or answers. I would invite hon. members to try to refrain from that conduct. It tends to lead to disorder in the House.

The hon. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has the floor.

● (1500)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I will not repeat what is obvious to anyone who watches the news.

What we have is a case where we work with first nations in Ontario, in the region, to set priorities based first on health and safety. That is why there are no other first nations besides Attawapiskat saying that their schools should be a priority. We work with first nations to set the priorities. I do not base it on which riding it belongs in; I base it on need.

We are going to provide schools across this country based on need and not based on how much publicity the member in the corner can get.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after many years of neglect under the previous government, the Americas have been identified by the Prime Minister as a top foreign policy priority.

As neighbours in the western hemisphere, our current and future interests are interdependent. The Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas) recently visited the region.

Oral Questions

Would the minister inform the House what our government is doing to further our leadership role in the hemisphere, and what priorities and progress Canada has made in the region?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the previous Liberal government ignored our friends in the Americas, I am pleased to report to the House that Canada is back with a long-term commitment to the region which will focus on three key pillars: prosperity, security and democratic government.

I was able to express the Government of Canada's concern over credible reports of election fraud in recent elections in Nicaragua to its president in an open and honest way.

Last week, while in the Caribbean, I was able to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of State for the Status of Women failed to tell the House what files she has the lead on that currently concern women in this country. In committee she could not or would not provide details on what gender-based analysis was done on the budget or what role her department played.

Can the minister advise the House and the women of Canada as to any leadership her department provided in ensuring that gender equity was considered in preparation of all aspects of the budget?

Hon. Helena Guergis (Minister of State (Status of Women), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member is very disappointed in the Liberal Party's record and her own personal record on women's issues. They had 13 years to deliver, but they failed.

Not only did they cut funding for status of women twice, but they also failed to deliver pay equity and they failed aboriginal women, while we on this side of the House delivered on all those and more. Not only do we have the highest percentage of women in cabinet, but I am the first minister of state solely dedicated to status of women, and I say clearly that I know how to use my little big stick.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PRIVACY

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when she appeared before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, the Privacy Commissioner stated that she did not know how many countries Canada had exchanged personal information with or the nature of the information shared between responsible officials from each institution.

Can the President of the Treasury Board or the Minister of Justice tell us the nature of the information that was exchanged and which countries it was exchanged with?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have that question.

Our government is committed to safeguarding the personal information and privacy rights of Canadians. The Auditor General and the Privacy Commissioner work together with us to ensure that occurs.

I am proud to say that our government has already begun taking action to address those matters. We are taking action. We are showing leadership. I am proud to be a part of the government that values the privacy of Canadians.

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CHALK RIVER NUCLEAR FACILITY

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday under oath the head of Canada's nuclear agency admitted that spills from Canadian facilities are radioactive even after treatment.

The December spill at the Chalk River facility dumped at least 28 kilograms of radioactive waste water, yet no less than five times has the minister stood in the House denying the reality that radioactive waste has already been dumped into the Ottawa River.

Will the minister finally do the right thing, stand in her place and apologize to Canadians for her reckless misrepresentation of the facts?

● (1505)

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday it was made very clear by the president of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission that at no time was there a risk to the health and safety of the Canadian public, to workers or to the environment with respect to leaks at the Chalk River facility.

Those are the facts. That is the truth.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, throughout the last month this government has made significant investments in infrastructure in all corners of our great country. Communities small and large will benefit from our unprecedented commitments.

Can Canada's Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities please remind the House of the great work that our government has been doing to improve infrastructure nationwide?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only is this government working tremendously well in the province of Ontario with my premier, but we are also reaching across the aisle and working with Liberals right across the country. We have been working very hard with the Liberal government in British Columbia, where just last week we announced \$175 million of new funds.

These funds will do two things: they will build a lot of great infrastructure on the west coast and they will create a lot of jobs, hope and opportunity.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order, please. I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Kevin Falcon, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure for British Columbia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: We have a number of points of order we are going to deal with now. I will start with the hon. member for St. Paul's.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

COMMENTS OF MINISTER OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have read with some dismay the *Hansard* of yesterday and the comments from the Minister of Veterans Affairs. I have no idea what he is talking about in terms of mimicking and mocking the minister.

Today a number of people have asked what on earth happened. I have to tell them that from reading this, one would think there had been truly unparliamentary behaviour, such as the obscene gestures done from that side on many occasions, as well as the ad hominem heckling. I expect the Minister of Veterans Affairs to apologize to me for what is in this *Hansard*.

Hon. Greg Thompson (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand by my words. My colleagues saw the actions as well, and I invite them to get on their feet. I would expect more from the member, because many of her members came forward. They saw what she did. We all know what she did. She should be ashamed. She should stand in her place to apologize. I laid it out yesterday. There is no need for me to repeat it, but I invite members and colleagues to stand in their places and describe exactly what she did.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too had the unfortunate opportunity yesterday to witness the gestures of the member for St. Paul's. They were gestures designed to mimic what one would consider the stereotype of a dumb blonde woman, tossing her head from side to side, laughing at the gestures, sharing the laughter with others around her as others mimicked a high-pitched voice, all designed to create the implication that somehow women cannot be taken seriously in this place.

It was, I believe, a very sad day. To have that gesture coming from a woman member of Parliament particularly saddened me. I believe she would do herself the service of apologizing to this House for her gesture. I am sure that on reflection she will feel that way.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because *Hansard* is in black and white, I just wanted to point out that my colleague from St. Paul's is a blonde woman.

• (1510)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order I, like the Minister of Veterans Affairs, saw the actions of the member for

Points of Order

St. Paul's. I respect the member for St. Paul's. It was quite evident from many members on the government side of the House exactly what she did, exactly what her intent was and exactly what the laughter of her Liberal colleagues was. I know the member to be a member of great honour. The member should stand and apologize for what she has done to this House.

The Speaker: I have heard enough on this point. We are going to move on to some other points of order. I will come back to that one, if need be, later.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in question period today, both the member of Parliament for Vancouver South and the member of Parliament for Vancouver Centre made factual errors in their questions about the gang activity that has unfortunately been taking place in the Vancouver region.

It is horrible enough without gross exaggeration. To set the record straight, in the last four weeks there have been 18 shootings and 8 deaths, not 18 deaths.

The Speaker: The hon. member knows that is not a point of order.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh has a point of order, I believe.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in response to a question from the leader of the NDP, the Prime Minister indicated that prorogation had taken place only after three years. He seems to have forgotten the prorogation his government called in September 2007 that resulted in a lengthy delay in crime bills being passed through this House, along with all sorts of other delays they have done.

I wonder if he would stand and acknowledge that he made that error.

The Speaker: Again, I think the hon. member is engaging in debate, not a point of order. It does not appear to be a procedural matter.

Does the hon. member for Vancouver East have a point of order also?

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during question period the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development made a very offensive and insulting personal attack on the member for Timmins—James Bay, who was very straightforwardly asking a question based on access to information and factual information that is now in the public realm.

I would ask the minister to withdraw his very offensive and insulting remarks to our member, who was simply carrying out his duty on behalf of his constituents and raising a legitimate question in the House. To be insulted in that manner by a minister is something we should not allow to happen. It should not be tolerated, and I would ask the minister to apologize to the member for Timmins—James Bay.

Points of Order

The Speaker: I have pointed out to the House that comments of a personal nature are unnecessary in both questions and answers. I hope that message is clear to all hon. members. The member has made her point. I do not believe the words were out of order and I said so at the time. I think that they were unnecessary and I urge hon. members to refrain from unnecessarily personal comments in the course of their comments in the House.

I think that is as far as the Chair is able to go on this matter. The hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your comments, but the fact of the matter is that I would like to give the minister the opportunity to apologize for what he said. His remarks were offensive—

The Speaker: The member has given the minister the opportunity. He did not get up. I see he is getting up now. The hon. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure exactly what she would have me do. That question has accused me of lying and of putting children's interests at risk by causing them health and safety dangers through putting communities on a list based on which ridings they live in. The accusations against me are legion.

All I am saying is that what he does is not based on fact. It is simply based on what he could do to get into the media. That is the difference between what he has been doing, which I think is reprehensible, and the fact that if I am asked a factual question, I am happy to answer with a factual answer.

The Speaker: That is the end of that. The hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville on a point of order.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to rise on a point of order. I am very concerned about how the language in the House is degrading. There is a lack of decorum. Attacks are becoming highly personal and highly unparliamentary.

Today we saw the Minister for the Status of Women talk about her little big stick. I find this highly offensive and inappropriate. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development used the word “claptrap”. Does he understand the implication of that statement? I find it highly reprehensible. I am offended. I would like an apology and I would like both remarks withdrawn.

• (1515)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville has certainly raised a point about the use of language in the House. I am delighted, in one sense, that the issue has been raised. I urge all hon. members to show restraint in their questions and answers, but I do not think the remarks that were made, offensive as they may be to some members, were out of order. I have said that in the course of virtually all the remarks made in the House, and I do not understand all the references in all those comments.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay. I hope this is not the continuation of a debate that I have already indicated is not a point of order.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an important clarification. I willingly accept that my hon. colleague is going to say what he is going to, but when he was asked to apologize, he said he would answer a factual question. I raised a question based on documents I received from his office. That is a factual question. It is a fair question, and the minister has to respond or withdraw the kind of—

The Speaker: The minister did give a response. Obviously, it created controversy. I have indicated several times now that I do not think the words used were out of order, but I have urged hon. members to show greater restraint in their questions and answers. I continue to urge that. We will now proceed with something else.

* * *

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

The Speaker: Hon. members will want to hear all about private members' business in this fascinating statement.

At the beginning of the last Parliament on May 31, 2006, as well as at the beginning of the one before that on November 18, 2004, I reminded all hon. members about the procedures governing private members' business and the responsibilities of the Chair in the management of this process. Given that the House is about to take up private members' business for the first time in this Parliament later this afternoon, I would like to make a statement regarding the management of private members' business.

[*Translation*]

As members know, certain constitutional procedural realities constrain the Speaker and members insofar as legislation is concerned. One procedural principle that I have underscored in a number of statements over the course of the two preceding Parliaments concerns the possibility that certain private member's bills may require a royal recommendation.

The requirement for a royal recommendation is grounded in constitutional principles found in the Constitution Act, 1867. The language of section 54 of that act is echoed in Standing Order 79(1), which reads:

This House shall not adopt or pass any vote, resolution, address or bill for the appropriation of any part of the public revenue, or of any tax or impost, to any purpose that has not been first recommended to the House by a message from the Governor General in the session in which such vote, resolution, address or bill is proposed.”

[*English*]

Any bill which authorizes the spending of public funds for a new and distinct purpose or effects an appropriation of public funds must be accompanied by a message from the Governor General recommending the expenditure to the House. This message, known formally as the royal recommendation, can only be transmitted to the House by a minister of the Crown.

Such bills may be introduced and considered right up until third reading on the assumption that a royal recommendation could be provided by a minister. If none is produced by the conclusion of the third reading stage, the Speaker is required to stop proceedings and rule the bill out of order.

[Translation]

Following the establishment and replenishment of the order of precedence, the Chair has developed the practice of reviewing items so that the House can be alerted to bills which, at first glance, appear to impinge on the financial prerogative of the Crown. The aim of this practice is to allow members the opportunity to intervene in a timely fashion to present their views about the need for those bills to be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

[English]

Accordingly, following the establishment of the order of precedence on February 13, 2009, I wish to draw the attention of the House to five bills that give the Chair some concern as to the spending provisions they contemplate. These are: Bill C-201, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act (deletion of deduction from annuity), standing in the name of the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore; Bill C-241, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (removal of waiting period), standing in the name of the member for Brome—Missisquoi; Bill C-279, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (amounts not included in earnings), standing in the name of the hon. member for Welland; Bill C-280, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (qualification for and entitlement to benefits), standing in the name of the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasung; and Bill C-309, An Act establishing the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Region of Northern Ontario, standing in the name of the hon. member for Nipissing—Timiskaming.

• (1520)

[Translation]

I would encourage hon. members who would like to make arguments regarding the need for a royal recommendation for any of these bills, or with regard to any other bills now on the order of precedence, to do so at an early opportunity.

[English]

I thank all hon. members for their attention to this important ruling.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, three reports of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. The first report is on spousal sponsorship. The second report is on Iraq war resisters. The third report is on language rights before the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

FINANCE

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Finance in relation to Bill C-10, An

Routine Proceedings

Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on January 27, 2009 and related fiscal measures.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following reports of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts: the first report, on chapter 4, Military Health Care, National Defence, of the October 2007 report of the Auditor General of Canada; the second report, on chapter 5, Keeping the Border Open and Secure, Canada Border Services Agency, of the October 2007 report of the Auditor General of Canada; the third report, on chapter 3, Inuvialuit Final Agreement, of the October 2007 report of the Auditor General of Canada; the fourth report, on chapter 5, Managing the Delivery of Legal Services to Government, Department of Justice Canada, of the May 2007 report of the Auditor General of Canada; and the fifth report, on chapter 4, Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, of the May 2007 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

In accordance with Standing Order 107, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to each of these reports.

* * *

ALS MONTH ACT

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-321, An Act to designate the month of June as Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (also known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease) Month.

He said: Mr. Speaker, amyotrophic is a tough word to say. The purpose of the bill is to recognize the month of June as ALS month across Canada. Hopefully the bill and the debates that will take place on it will bring this devastating disease to the attention of Canadians.

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

* * *

• (1525)

CANADA POST CORPORATION ACT

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-322, An Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (library materials).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this amendment would do two things. It would preserve a reduced rate for postage on books between libraries, and would expand the library book rate program to include magazines, records, CDs, CD-ROMs, audio cassettes, video cassettes, DVDs, and other audio-visual materials. This is something that Canadian libraries and Canadians have been asking for since 1967.

I would like to thank Rhea Laube for her tremendous work on the bill on my behalf and on behalf of all Canadians. I look forward to the support of all members of Parliament on this very important amendment.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-323, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (compassionate care benefits for dependent children).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am introducing to the House this private member's bill which amends the Employment Insurance Act in order to allow the parents of sick children to be eligible for employment insurance.

As most people are aware, when a family lives in a region where specialized children's hospitals are not nearby, it is very difficult for parents of a sick child to get to hospital with their child and at the same time continue to work in order to support the whole family. This is a reality that exists, and the parent who has to stop work in order to be with a child in a specialized hospital is no longer providing any revenue for the family unit. It is already hard enough to have a sick child, and it is still harder when there is no longer any income.

This private member's bill enables a parent to draw employment insurance benefits while attending to a child in a hospital located outside the region of residence. I have heard much about this situation from parents in recent months and years. It is very important for the House to examine this situation and it is also important to ensure that the public is made aware of it so that financial assistance can be provided to parents most in need of it. We must ensure that what their child is going through does not also have a negative financial impact on the entire family.

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

* * *

[*English*]

COMPETITION ACT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-324, An Act to amend the Competition Act and the Food and Drugs Act (child protection against advertising exploitation).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill was developed in cooperation with the Center for Science in the Public Interest and was supported by the Toronto Board of Health in a meeting held just a few months ago.

The bill bans advertising that is targeted at children. The obesity rate among children under the age of 13 continues to grow. It is very disturbing. There are many soft drink manufacturers and junk food manufacturers that target advertising toward children. We have to ensure that our kids are protected from that kind of advertising and manipulation.

[*Translation*]

Similar legislative measures have been in place in Quebec since the 1980s, and the same thing has been proposed in England. Since the introduction of these measures concerning children, the rate of

obesity and the amounts of soft drinks consumed in Quebec are among the lowest in Canada. That is why I am introducing this bill.

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

* * *

[*English*]

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-325, An Act to change the name of the electoral district of Welland.

He said: Mr. Speaker, quite often people will ask what is in a name, and to my constituents, it is everything. At one point in time not that long ago the riding of Welland was known as the riding of Niagara Centre. The component in the Welland riding is actually the city of Welland, but the riding composes the city of Port Colborne, the city of Thorold, parts of the city of St. Catharines and indeed the township of Wainfleet. People of those communities have no real affinity with the city of Welland, so it really is a misnomer to name the riding "Welland" in the sense of what it really encompasses.

My constituents are saying that Niagara Centre is where they live and Niagara Centre is what they identify with. I would hope to obtain unanimous consent in the House to change the name back to what it was before, Niagara Centre, a name which identifies those people and that constituency.

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

* * *

● (1530)

OPEN GOVERNMENT ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-326, An Act to amend the Access to Information Act (open government).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas not only for seconding the bill, but for his tireless work on the subject of freedom of information and access to information.

The bill finds its origin in the notion that the people of Canada have the right to know what their government is doing with their money. In fact, even further, we argue that freedom of information is the very oxygen that democracy breathes.

I would like to pay tribute to a former member of Parliament, Mr. John Bryden, who dedicated most of his career to fighting for access to information reform, and also to Mr. John Reid, the former information commissioner, who drafted this very bill that I am putting forward for first reading today. The bill was written chapter and verse by one of the foremost authorities on access to information, the former information commissioner himself.

Never has there been a more pressing need for the public's right to know than on the threshold of rolling out the massive financial stimulus package. The public deserves to know how the money is being spent and the public deserves access to the government files where the information is held.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

CANADIAN AUTISM DAY ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-327, An Act respecting a Canadian Autism Day.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce an act respecting national autism day. I am proud to introduce legislation that would recognize the work and struggles of those with autism.

It also would recognize the challenges faced by friends and families of people with this condition, in particular parents who raise an autistic child and all the special people who work with and advocate for them. It is right and overdue to mark and appreciate these challenges.

So much about autism remains to be discovered, and I know many in the House have called for additional funding for research, support and coverage under the Canada Health Act. I repeat that call today.

The creation of a national autism day will bring light and attention to those who fall on the autism spectrum and to those who tirelessly support a family member or friend with autism, people like Abbe and Lucas Gates, Patti Bacchus and Dawn Steele.

I ask all members to support the bill.

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

* * *

PETITIONS**RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN**

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am truly delighted to present this petition wherein the petitioners note that under current federal criminal law an unborn child is not recognized as a victim with respect to violent crimes. They note as well a vast majority of the public support laws that protect unborn children from acts of violence against their mothers which injure or kill the child in the womb.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to enact legislation which will recognize unborn children as separate victims when they are injured or killed during the commission of an offence against their mothers, allowing two charges to be laid instead of just one.

● (1535)

TRANSPORTATION OF ANIMALS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from concerned citizens with the Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals. They are petitioning the government to strengthen the animal transportation regulations.

The petitioners request that the amendment to the current Health of Animals Act be consistent with the findings of the EU Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare, which will reduce transportation time for pigs, poultry, calves and lambs to 8 hours and 12 hours for sheep and goats, and to ensure adequate enforcement of regulations.

IRAQ

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am filing this petition with the House on behalf of more than 370 residents of Edmonton and area.

The petitioners are appealing to the House of Commons and the Government of Canada on behalf of Christians of Iraq. They are petitioning the House to protect the lives and security of Christians in Iraq. They are seeking peacekeeping forces as well as aid, food, clothing, medicine and refuge in Canada for refugees.

COALITION GOVERNMENT

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition on behalf of the constituents of Wetaskiwin.

The petitioners, as residents of Canada, draw the attention of the House to the fact that in the recent federal election, concluded October 14, 2008, Canadian voters provided the Conservative Party with a clear and strengthened mandate to lead Canada through the current global economic crisis and that the opposition are looking to impose an unstable, unelected Liberal-NDP-separatist coalition. During the election, they promised they would not entertain the Liberal leader, expressly rejecting such a move as being bad for the economy.

This is another list of constituents of mine who are very upset and frustrated with the attempted coup to take over the democratically elected government.

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of 800 fishers from Newfoundland and Labrador and 50 from Quebec who have been treated unfairly by Revenue Canada.

In 1998 the federal government introduced the Atlantic groundfish licence retirement program, which made it possible for fishers to voluntarily retire from the fishing industry. The benefit they would have received was taxed by Revenue Canada to the tune of 100%, treated as capital gains.

In fact, it was wrong. The wrong information was provided to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans by Revenue Canada. Instead of being taxed 100%, it really should have been 25%.

The fishers call upon the government to now undo this damage and treat them fairly. To put names to some of these fishers, they are: Douglas Harvey of Isle Aux Morts; Allen Munden of Burnt Islands; Beatrice Poole of Belleoram; Samuel Coombs of Shoal Cove West; Henry Doyle of New Ferolle; and Clayton Burton of Little Bay East. These are some of the 850 fishers who have been treated unfairly. They now ask the government to treat them fairly and give them back the taxes they were charged.

Government Orders

POLYBROMINATED DIPHENYL ETHERS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table today in the House a petition signed by over 100 residents of my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster, calling upon Parliament to adopt my motion to ban PBDEs.

As members know, polybrominated diphenyl ethers, PBDEs, are the new PCBs. They pose a health hazard to all Canadians, particularly to younger Canadians who have higher concentrations of PBDEs in their bloodstreams.

Members of my riding call upon Parliament to adopt legislation that would ban all PBDEs in Canada and that this should be adopted within a year.

The second petition is from dozens of residents of southern Ontario from Toronto, Hamilton, Welland area and Kenora. The petitioners call upon Parliament to adopt the motion to ban all PBDEs in Canada within a year as well.

OMAR KHADR

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, normally when I rise in this place to present a petition on behalf of Canadians, I am quite pleased and proud to do so, but today I am sad.

In this case of over 100 petitioners, my sadness comes from the fact that these Canadians feel they have to petition on behalf of Omar Khadr. They are petitioning the government on the fact that they understand Omar Khadr was a child soldier, but their government does not. They are petitioning that Omar Khadr be brought home.

* * *

• (1540)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ARCTIC WATERS POLLUTION PREVENTION ACT

The House resumed from February 23 consideration of the motion that Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: When the matter was last under debate before the House, the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway had the floor, and there are six minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks.

I therefore call upon the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to have the opportunity to continue my comments on this important legislation.

Before I do, I want to commend the excellent work of my colleague, the hon. member for Western Arctic, for his incisive analysis and wonderful commitment both to the territorial integrity, our environment as well as the welfare of the people of the north.

The bill highlights a number of issues and policies of great importance to Canadians. Canadians care deeply about protecting our sovereignty, about defending the territorial integrity of our boundaries, of protecting our waters and the rich life that dwells within them.

Canadians care deeply about our pristine Arctic and the need to keep this precious part of our country preserved for generations to come.

Last but not least Canadians care profoundly about our environment and the need for prompt and effective action to combat climate change.

The bill also highlights the need for Canada to pursue a course that respects international co-operation and diplomacy, to resolve co-operatively with all the countries that have claims and interests around the Arctic and to resolve any and all territorial issues that may arise.

First and foremost on our minds and in all our relations with all other countries must be the need to protect and preserve the Arctic, not only as an important piece of our climate but also as an important piece of land that has been occupied for thousands and thousands of years by the first nations of our country.

I want to speak a little about climate change and the environment. We are seeing dramatic effects of worldwide climate change, in particular on the Arctic. We are seeing melting ice and threatened species. We are threatened on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis with rising sea levels.

Most important, and alarmingly, the effects of climate change on the Arctic is a signal of worldwide climate catastrophe. However, I want to speak a little about solutions.

In the south, where the vast majority of Canadians live, where the vast majority of people of the world live and, most important, where the problems that cause climate change are primarily created, we have the tools and means available to us to deal with this problem and help preserve the Arctic.

Government Orders

We need to support all development, all industry, all jobs and all technology that will help create solar power and wind power, which will start to harness the tidal forces on both coasts of our country and, in fact, in the north. We need to harness geothermal heat as an important source of heating our northern country.

The New Democrat caucus is firmly committed to pursuing a new economy that supports green technologies, green industries and green jobs. We need to find ways to reduce and to price carbon effectively. Our party campaigned very strongly and effectively on establishing a cap and trade system, a system that would have hard caps, one that would start to slow down and reverse the emission of greenhouse gases, which are such a prime cause of worldwide climate warming.

President Obama gets it. The United States is starting to control its levels of greenhouse gas emissions better than Canada is.

Therefore, I urge all members of the House to join with the New Democrats in helping to protect our Arctic, and this can only be done by protecting our environment. It is important we protect our borders and this can be only done by protecting our coastlines.

Last, it is so important that we protect Canadian sovereignty and this can only be done by acting with intelligence, co-operation and diplomacy on the world stage.

I urge all members of the House to join with New Democrats and continue to fight hard to protect our environment, to enhance Canadian sovereignty and to act strongly and fairly on behalf of all Canadians and on the world stage.

• (1545)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in talking about the Arctic and the protection of the Arctic, it cannot be extricated from the notion of climate change. We have seen this time and again. In fact, studies that had been done in Canada's Arctic were one of the first and earliest warning signs of the effects of climate change and what they could possibly be.

Despite those warnings, despite the alarm bells sounding year after year, we have seen successive Canadian governments choose to look away. We have seen successive Canadian governments put the very fabric of the Arctic's ecosystem at risk by simply not making decisions that were required to wrestle to the ground this challenge around greenhouse gas emissions.

During the recent visit of the President of the United States to Canada, in the one public moment that the president and Prime Minister had, the Prime Minister alluded to the idea that a cap and trade system was equal if we were to measure greenhouse gas emissions both by intensity, which is being suggested here and only here in Canada by the government, and a hard cap, that those were somehow interchangeable and that the market could operate together, that the Canadian system, the Conservative system of intensity targets, which, frankly, nobody in the world uses that we have been able to find, were somehow interchangeable and we could now allow Canadian companies access to the market that will be established in the U.S.

In the real case of the legislation working its way through congress right now, it uses an entirely different system of measuring

greenhouse gas emissions and proposes an entirely different system of actually dealing with investments around climate change. One is actually in sync with the European Union, with the Kyoto process and our partner countries.

I wonder if the member could comment on this strange dysfunction that our Prime Minister seems to have when trying to get the idea of how this thing will work and how we will deal with climate change.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley and commend him for his long work on the environmental file. He is respected among all members of this House and by the Canadian public for his diligent and long-standing effort on behalf of the environment.

It is worth reminding all Canadians that the New Democratic Party was the first party to use the words “climate change” in this House of Commons in the early 1980s. At that time, of course, many people on the other side of the House in the Liberal and Conservative Parties actually ridiculed us for that. They called us alarmists and tree-huggers. In fact, as late as 2002 the Prime Minister was still calling Kyoto a socialist plot.

I think all Canadians now know that this is no game. Climate change is here, it is real and it must be dealt with.

My hon. colleague asked about emission intensity versus hard caps. He raises an excellent point. Establishing a cap and trade system that is based on emission intensity is untried and untested. It is simply not accepted by the vast majority of respected scientists in this world. I do not even think it is accepted by the industries that are expected to implement it.

What we need in this country is a system of hard caps. If we are serious about combatting climate change and bringing down greenhouse gases, we need to set aggressive levels and bring them down in a studied and measured annual and five year allotted time zone so we can bring them down in a controlled fashion. This is the system that I understand was used successfully to deal with the acid rain problem that afflicted the Great Lakes. It was a cap and trade system that was used effectively by industry, by business and by joint cooperation between the United States and Canada to effectively tackle that problem.

• (1550)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask my colleague a question on probably the sidebar of the impacts of the changing environment on the Arctic, and that is Arctic research.

There was a story in the press today containing commentary by the executive director of the International Polar Year. He spoke about the excellent work that had been done by scientists in accumulating data over the past year under an International Polar Year convention but went on to say that it was in some jeopardy because there was no further funding to do the analysis, to do the research and to carry on with the collection of data.

Government Orders

This is a moving target in the Arctic and we cannot be satisfied with one year. We must continue the programs of research and development, research in the Arctic and the development of strategies to combat the changing climate conditions there.

How does my colleague see, within the Conservative mentality within the budget that we are seeing now, the required direction to researchers to continue the very important work that is going on now and was going on in the past in the Arctic?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, in a nutshell, I do not see it. This bill would extend the territorial waters of our north by, I believe, another 100 kilometres, which is an important development, but expanding the territorial integrity of our country without protecting and preserving the environmental, social and cultural health of what lies within those borders is folly.

One of the main failings of this budget before us is that it simply does not do enough in terms of scientific research. While there are some positive measures in the budget in that respect, we need to go much farther and much faster in this regard.

The hon. member for Western Arctic spoke about polar bears. What is most alarming about the threats to this species is that it exists at the highest level of the food chain. If we have problems at that level of higher order mammals, that is a harbinger of deep problems environmentally in the north.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent, cogent and clear remarks on the bill. It is an important bill and I commend the government for bringing it forward. We need to extend the ambit of our responsibilities over the Arctic and extend those protections.

What is unfortunate is that the government did not bring forward at the same time measures to protect the coastal regions. Those who work in the area of marine law and marine protection fully understand that it is not enough to simply protect the ocean as it is. What is even more important is to protect the areas of land that are on the edge of those waters because there may be deleterious substances and a lot of activities, erosion and so forth, that can affect the fishery, the wildlife and the clarity of the water.

It is one thing to table a strong law but it is another thing to have the leadership to actually bring forward the resources and the strategy to enforce it. The commissioner for sustainable development, when he tabled his report in the last couple of weeks, raised a litany of problems and failures of the government to actually enforce the law.

The former minister of the environment, in the mid-1980s when the government first tabled the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, said, "A law is hollow without an enforcement strategy".

Does the hon. member think it is important to also bring forward a strategy on enforcing this law and actually putting it into effect?

• (1555)

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, once again, it is my pleasure to commend the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona who also, through decades of effective work in the environmental movement, is respected by Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

She is absolutely dead on in pointing out that enforcement is an incredibly important component of this bill and, in fact, all environmental measures.

I also want to take this opportunity to commend the government on this bill. As we have said already, we do support the bill and we will work with the government to improve it in any respect that we can.

I want to conclude my remarks on this bill by pointing out that Canadians want effective environmental legislation. The concern about this bill is that we would be expanding our sovereignty and protecting our territory for the purpose of exploiting natural resources and minerals in the area. If that is the case, then we would be doing a disservice to Canadians because Canadians value the Arctic. What is priceless to them is to have a pristine area of our country and an incredibly important aspect of the world climate system preserved for generations to come.

We owe that debt to our children and grandchildren and to the citizens of the world, and the New Democrats will work toward that goal.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

[*English*]

MARINE LIABILITY ACT

Hon. Chuck Strahl (for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities) moved that Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Marine Liability Act and the Federal Courts Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to discuss with my hon. colleagues an opportunity for each of us to work together to protect our environment from the effects of marine pollution from ships, which all Canadians want us to do.

If the government's proposed amendments to the Marine Liability Act, as outlined in Bill C-7, are passed into law, they would have important environmental and economic impacts for all Canadians.

Government Orders

Together we can better protect Canadians from oil spills and ensure polluters actually pay for what they do. We can protect Canadians aboard passenger vessels, ensure the continued viability of a very important tourism sector and provide fairness for Canadian businesses that supply ships.

The act as it stands now is very ill-equipped to tackle the realities of marine transport today and inadequate to realize our 21st century ambitions.

Before I review our proposed amendments in detail, I would remind all hon. members of how important marine transportation is to Canada and Canadians.

As a trading nation, Canada relies on shipping to provide Canadians with one of the world's highest standards of living. In 2007, for instance, ships carried more than 365 million tonnes of international cargo. This represents some \$160 billion worth of international trade and includes more than \$81 billion in exports. That \$160 billion is a staggering sum to say the least.

Seventy million tonnes of cargo are transported domestically each year by ships operating between Canadian ports on the Pacific, Atlantic and Arctic coasts; along the St. Lawrence Seaway; and throughout the Great Lakes system.

Canadian ferries actually carry some 40 million passengers and 16 million automobiles each and every year. They are also part of daily commuting for many Canadians in cities such as Halifax and Vancouver.

Almost 1.5 million people, Canadians and foreign visitors alike, enjoy scenic cruises on Canadian waters each and every year.

Shipping is among the most efficient modes of transport and among the most effective in reducing road congestion, which helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and that is important to our future.

Transport Canada is collaborating as I speak with Canadian industry and the governments of the United States and Mexico to promote a more ecological use of North American shipping routes. We are encouraging increased shipping of people and goods along our coasts and using internal waterways.

With the possibility of increased shipping and marine traffic in potentially sensitive areas of Canada's Arctic, we must take steps right now to ensure that Canada is ready for this growth.

Our government is absolutely determined to protect our Arctic areas, which we will do by passing the measures before us with the help of our other colleagues in this place.

Marine transport is absolutely essential to Canada's economic viability in the future. We see it as a real growth industry for Canada. It can also, however, constitute a potential risk to people, to goods and to the environment. Hence, the reason for the bill. Most of these risks actually stem from the potential for mishaps inherent in most forms of industrial activity and all modes of transport. Most notable in shipping is the risk of collisions or grounding during which passengers and crew members can be injured, not to mention the risk of oil spills and other similar situations that arise as a result of these incidents.

These amendments would build upon initiatives that this government has already taken while fostering marine transportation activity to improve Canada's economy.

Shipping is a global activity and, therefore, it needs globally harmonized rules.

Canada is a founding member of the International Maritime Organization and has worked diligently toward multilateral solutions for issues facing marine transportation. Achieving global consistency in these rules would benefit the marine industry and Canada's trade with other nations and, ultimately, all Canadians.

• (1600)

These amendments would demand that commercial ships which carry Canadians have proper insurance. This covers all ships including commuter ferries and tour boats, and it simply makes sense for today's environment. This is not an unjust burden. We do it for the airline industry, why not the marine industry? Should Canadians feel less secure or be less safe on a ferry or a tour boat than on an airplane? We in this Conservative government do not think so. Canadians should feel safe and be protected in whatever mode of transportation they choose.

Canadians will be further protected while small businesses like whitewater rafting companies and sea kayaking guides, for example, will not be burdened by unfair economic regulations. During this particular time of global economic hardship we do not want to place any onerous regulations on small business owners that could potentially have serious consequences for the adventure travel industry, the individual owner, or indeed, seasonal employees.

Tourism is also a very important sector of the economy and is actually in a state of growth. Thousands upon thousands of Canadian jobs depend on tourism. These amendments would ensure that Canadians are protected while meeting the unique needs of marine adventure tourism. Most importantly, from an environmental perspective, these amendments to the Marine Liability Act would enhance the liability and compensation regimes that Canada has in place to respond to oil pollution from ships.

Canada has one of the longest coastlines in the world. We are bordered by three oceans and we use ships to carry a very significant portion of our trade each year. Large volumes of oil and other petroleum products pass through our ports every year, some 70 million tonnes annually. Much of that is on tankers with far bigger capacities than for instance, the *Exxon Valdez*, and most of us remember what happened in Alaska in 1989 in relation to that disastrous spill.

Government Orders

With the limitations of our current legislation Canada simply would not be able to cope with a spill of that magnitude if one were to happen tomorrow in our waters. Despite advances in both safety and technology, marine shipping spills still continue to happen. These damage the environment and often damage local economies. We cannot have that continue without some form of liability and compensation to those affected.

I am thinking in particular of the *Hebei Spirit* incident in South Korea in December 2007, after the vessel collided with another ship. That spill had huge costs and highlighted the need for a more effective response mechanism.

One does not need to go as far as Korea, however, to see the devastating effects of oil spills. We can simply look back at Canadian history. Many of us may recall the *Kurdistan* incident off the coast of Nova Scotia in 1979 or the *Rio Orinoco* incident near Anticosti Island in Quebec in 1992, or indeed even the *Irving Whale* incident of 1970 off the coast of Prince Edward Island.

While none of these spills was as big or as damaging as the *Exxon Valdez* or even the *Hebei Spirit* incident, a spill is a spill and is not acceptable, and Canada's luck may one day run out. That is why it is so important to continue with this aggressive stance in this legislation.

The bottom line is every day that we delay taking action and not putting in place the measures in this bill we add to the risk of victims going on without adequate compensation. That is not acceptable. People like fishermen and tourism operators who depend on the sea and waterways for their livelihoods need this protection.

These amendments would actually do something very significant. They would actually triple the level of compensation available to victims of oil spills from the maximum of \$500 million, which seems like a great sum but it is not in these kinds of situations, to \$1.5 billion, a tremendous sum. That is \$1.5 billion for each and every incident. These massive increases in compensation would ensure strong protection for Canadians and the environment while maintaining a balance between associated interests, namely the ship owners and the oil companies that pay contributions into the fund's system. Taxpayers should not be on the hook for these costs.

• (1605)

Our government believes in holding polluters absolutely accountable for their actions. With the help of this legislation we will hold them accountable.

The bill also introduces an enhanced regime for shipowner liability for spills of bunker oil used to propel ships. These types of spills tend to be more common than those coming from larger tankers because virtually all ships sailing today use this type of oil. These kinds of spills happen in Canada often and can actually cause a lot of damage to the ecosystem.

Like the requirement already in place for tankers, this bunker oil liability regime would include a compulsory insurance provision which is a good thing. We need to ensure that shipowners can make good on their obligations. They need to be able to compensate as a result of their negligence or inaction.

I should note that these enhancements would enable Canada to also ratify two international maritime organization conventions that are based on the polluter pays principle. The benefits to Canada of continuing its long standing multilateral approach to international shipping and the ratification of these two conventions are very obvious.

Canada is behind the world currently on this issue and this Conservative government will ensure that Canada catches up and protects Canadians and our environment. In this we have the full support of industry as well which accepts its liability under the act and the international conventions.

It should also be noted that the amendments that we are discussing here today would actually establish a mandatory insurance requirement for passenger ships as well. Canadian businesses would benefit also and these amendments would put Canadian companies supplying foreign ships docked in our ports on equal footing with their American counterparts.

Currently, if a foreign ship does not pay its bill, Canadian companies are simply out of pocket. Under this bill that would change. Increased fairness would be achieved by providing our Canadian ship suppliers with a maritime lien, much like a building lien, as security for unpaid invoices.

These are Canadian companies that supply ships that call at Canadian ports with everything from fuel to water, to food and equipment that is being purchased. Today these businesses do not have the same rights as American businesses who supply the same ship in their own port. Not even our own courts here in Canada will do this. That is because American ship suppliers benefit from a lien in American law which can be enforced in Canadian courts.

These Canadian businesses have been telling the government for some time that they also need the same protection. This Conservative government is delivering that protection to them.

In conclusion, I would like to remind the House that with this legislation we are going to do four specific things: first, protect Canadians against oil spills and make sure that polluters pay; second, protect Canadians aboard passenger vessels which is so important; third, ensure the continued viability of an important tourism sector; and fourth, provide fairness for Canadian businesses that supply ships.

We believe that these proposed amendments are the very right thing to do and the best thing to do going forward. They strike the balance to encourage environmentally responsible marine transportation and to protect the interests of Canadians. That is why we are here in this place.

We are modernizing an outdated act and these are all changes that all Canadians can agree upon. I urge all hon. members to give the bill their unanimous support. I look forward to working with them when the bill reaches committee. I believe that we will be able to find very common ground and move forward with this legislation effectively and positively for the benefit of all Canadians.

Government Orders

•(1610)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): I listened intently to the speech by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. I had the pleasure of sitting with him on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. I had to smile—he talked about urgency and agreements and conventions that Canada has signed but not yet ratified—precisely because we are not able to pass this bill.

I would simply like to say that he could have done it during the last Parliament. It was his government and his Prime Minister that chose to trigger an election, going against their own fixed election date legislation. It was a choice. What guarantee do we have that things will work this time and that all this effort will not be in vain because their leader decides to call another election?

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I will not comment on whether or not an election will be called because it is beyond my pay grade, but I will advise the member that, as he is aware, we have had four bills passed through the committee of which he is a member. It has been very effective as a committee over a two to three year period. I would suggest that those bills were also very important to Canadians. We heard from the marine industry in particular that one of those bills was very important to that industry.

We have got the work done and we continue to get the work done. We will continue to get the work done no matter whether there is an election or not, but I would encourage the member to support all the initiatives of the government. I am certain that we would not have an election if that were the case.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel poses a question that is crucial to the work of this House. He pointed out to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities that the bills studied by the House committee tasked with studying bills related to transport have always been treated promptly and in an acceptable manner, in a spirit of cooperation even. However, although the government introduces them in the House, it then abandons them.

My colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, many other members and I would like to have some assurance from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. If we tackle this bill as we have tackled other bills brought before the committee, does he now promise to send all those bills to the House for third reading, which will be accepted by the government?

•(1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member, first of all, that what we want to do is deliver positive results for Canadians. That is what we want to do. However, we did not see, and quite frankly most Canadians did not see, the coalition as being part of a

good thing for Canada. In fact, I have heard overwhelmingly from most Canadians that it is not.

I want to get beyond politics. This bill would protect Canadians against oil spills and makes sure that polluters pay. How can anyone in the House say that is a bad thing? It would protect Canadians aboard passenger vessels. That does not exist today. It would ensure the continued viability of the important tourism sector in Canada, which is one of our growth industries. We need to make sure we protect it so it continues to grow. It would provide fairness for Canadian businesses that supply ships.

My question would be, why did the Liberals not get it done? We have to get it done. We are getting it done. The Liberals should support us in getting it done.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the northwest, which I represent, is one of those areas most affected. I know the parliamentary secretary has visited there at times and knows the nature of the environment to some degree and how sensitive it is.

There are a couple of questions here as this is an extensive bill that we will have to look at. It has complexities to it.

The question has two parts. Up until this point, what powers did the government have prior to the bill on major oil spills in Canada? What powers does the government currently have without this being enacted into law to properly penalize the companies that do the spilling, or is it the Canadian taxpayer who is on the hook right now?

Under the limited liability section of this for passengers, we had the tragic sinking of the *Queen of the North* some months ago in the northwest, where two people died and many more were put at serious risk when a major passenger ferry from the B.C. Ferries sank after hitting an island. What availability would people have to compensation under the bill if such a tragedy occurred in the future?

These are two significant things. First, currently under the law, companies bringing oil into Canada or from Canada compensate Canadians if they spill, and second, what happens to the passengers who are affected by a tragedy on board a passenger ship?

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, this is actually a multi-pronged issue. I did have an opportunity to work with the member on the environment committee for some time and I know his passion for the environment, especially given where he is in northern B.C.

I can tell the member that the government is taking a multi-pronged approach. First, we are getting serious about our north and we are getting serious about our waters. We have invested heavily in ships. We have invested heavily in research capability so that the government can find the polluters first because that has not been available to us. Only the Americans seem to have the necessary technology to do so. We are investing in technology to make sure we find them, first.

We are tripling the fines from \$500 million to \$1.5 billion, and indeed, these two international conventions as well are along the same lines, making sure that we are on an international footing so we can work together with our colleagues around the world to make sure that polluters pay wherever they are.

Government Orders

This is a global situation where shippers are going from one part of the world to the other and dumping whenever they can get away with it. It will not continue to happen in Canada. The Prime Minister and the government will make sure of that.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for the great work he is doing as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and also for working hard for his constituents of Fort McMurray—Athabasca.

I have two quick questions for him specifically on the timing. Timing is of the essence. Why do we need to proceed at this time? How does this bill fit into the government's environmental agenda, specifically the mandate given to Canada's Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities?

• (1620)

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, it fits exactly with our focus on the initiatives of the Prime Minister to make sure that our marine environment stays clean and we stop the pollution that is currently happening in it.

This legislation will go toward ensuring that we have the most comprehensive liability and compensation regime in place for any potential disaster involving oil spills.

It is incumbent on us to make sure that all members of the House recognize how important this bill is and that they co-operate with us so that we can pass it in a timely fashion and make such amendments as are necessary in order to have the best bill possible so that we can protect Canadians.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to touch base with my hon. colleague on the nature of how the fund will work with respect to compensation for oil pollution damage as outlined in the bill. Perhaps he could discuss that.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, currently the details are not exact in my mind as far as how that is going to happen, except that it is going to be a polluter pays principle. Ultimately this means there will be a fund or an insurance regime in place to make sure that the shippers, the captains of the vessels are held accountable for what they do, and that the fund will compensate Canadians for what has been done.

I would encourage the member to come to our committee and to work co-operatively with us in that committee. He is a new member of the committee. I have had an opportunity to speak with him at length in relation to some of the other bills. I am sure that he will do a very good job in that committee and will co-operate fully with us to get this bill through in a timely fashion for his constituents and all Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): 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 Winnipeg South Centre, Status of Women; the hon. member for Québec, Infrastructure; the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to join in this debate today.

On behalf of my party, the official opposition, we will be taking a very close look at Bill C-7 because we think it has some valuable elements that need to be studied in greater detail in committee.

Before I carry on with my debate, I want to note that the parliamentary secretary is always irrepresible in his desire to make mountains out of molehills, even if molehills are important for the moles that inhabit them and for the people who rely on them, but he will make a great deal out of very little. Bill C-7, although very important, has given him a launching pad to talk about the economy and the environment even though it has very little to do with both.

He is right about the fact that the act may be inadequate, especially as it pertains to those issues which he outlined. This is, after all, a correction of and an adjustment to those issues that relate to liability under the marine act. For those who are unfamiliar with the terms, it has to do with who has to pay in the event of a transgression that Canadians would find absolutely unacceptable, whether they find it unacceptable on the personal liability side, or whether they find it unacceptable on the side of damage to the environment, to the geography, to those assets that Canadians have come to view as part of their standard of living and quality of life.

The parliamentary secretary is right. The bill is about that, but it is only about that. It is an important issue, and as I said, we will study it in detail in committee.

I want to outline for the House that the bill says that those who pollute will have the responsibility for the pollution itself and therefore, will suffer the liabilities in court because that is what we are going to do. We are going to harmonize our expectations with those of others in the world. We have not done that before. That is why the bill is inept. That is why the law as it stands has been adequate. That is why the parliamentary secretary, after three years in government, has finally awakened to that fact. Now we are going to harmonize the expectations of Canadians with the expectations and the practices of the world. That is what this legislation purports to do. We will see if in fact it does that.

It is encouraging that polluters would go from the current liability of \$545 million to about \$1.5 billion. It is encouraging as well that those who one might view simply as passengers or erstwhile in their association with activities and vessels that engage in activities—I hate to use the same word twice as I am beginning to sound like the parliamentary secretary and some of the Conservatives when they talk about getting the job done, but if the word fits, then I guess I may as well use it once or twice—but the important thing to keep in mind is that those who engage in cruises or some of the adventure tours should not be held responsible for those who bring them into those places and who, unbeknownst to them, shift off some of the liabilities for any of the pollution that they may create or the degradation that they may cause.

That is what the bill purports to do. It would do those two things. It does not say nor is there a mechanism for it to ensure that there is not going to be any pollution. It says that if the owners of those enterprises or those vessels do pollute, they will suffer more severely, potentially in a court of law. Why? Because we are going to raise the premiums and we are going to give greater access and greater application to those conventions already existing on a world scale and in which we have been lagging.

Government Orders

If this is a piece of legislation that brings us up to snuff, as people say, and allows us to meet a standard that is appropriate for everybody else and thereby hopefully builds a greater sense of responsibility on the part of the owners of those vessels or those who arrange activities, then that is good. That is why we are going to be positive as we address this legislation.

When I said earlier that the parliamentary secretary catapults from that into other things, he invites us to take a look at other issues that are related both to the economy and to the environment, but the government is engaged more and more in what we do with the jurisdiction that is provided.

• (1625)

For example, they become management issues, and the management issue of the day is associated with the way the economy is performing. I think the parliamentary secretary and some of his colleagues on the government side have said that the economy is not performing very well, that they are going to stimulate it and engage in a stimulus package that is going to spend dozens of billions of dollars in order to get the economy going. Because the parliamentary secretary invited us to peek through that window, I am going to ask him how this relates to the main agenda of the day, the main agenda of governments everywhere, and I would imagine it should be even this one. It certainly is seized by parliamentarians on this side of the House. I might give a rather gratuitous compliment to the members of the other opposition parties who are also seized with the issue of stimulating the economy. With what means? It is the topic of the day every day. We see it in every headline.

The Minister of Finance says that the government is going to stimulate, and then in the fine print, the government is going to sell off crown assets. Every crown corporation apparently is now up for grabs because the Minister of Finance needs the money in order to pay for the stimulus package, none of which is already on the table, none of which is focused on building an infrastructure for tomorrow's prosperity, none of which is focused on establishing a vision for tomorrow. What will Canadians get for the billions of dollars that this House will authorize the government to spend?

The parliamentary secretary invited that kind of observation when he talked about this bill, the marine liability bill, as being an economic bill and an environmental bill. I ask him, why would we invest additional moneys in some of the projects that he and his finance minister are proposing?

I do not want to pick on poor VIA Rail, but it seems it is one of the ones the Conservatives want to get rid of and dump very quickly. VIA Rail carries about 8,000 passengers a day. It receives \$212 million in government subsidies per year. That is about 45% of all of its operating costs, and the Conservatives are going to dump another \$300 million into VIA Rail before they put it on the block, for how much? Where is the vision? Where is the economic plan to spend all these stimulus dollars, to see that more people ride these trains and save on the environmental costs associated with train travel, assuming that they believe that that actually happens?

I think they believe it almost happens, because just last week they joined with the province of Ontario in giving about \$500 million to build parking lots for potential passengers on GO trains and GO buses. Imagine, about \$500 million is going toward that. That is

anywhere between \$25,000 and \$75,000 per parking spot, depending on what the operational costs were by way of contribution of any of the parties.

They are going to spend about \$300 million to improve VIA Rail. We do not know how they are going to do that, but they are not going to increase ridership and they do not know whether they are going to dump it. They want to get rid of it.

They want to get rid of other assets, such as Canada Post, for example. It is a revenue generating business. It raises about \$7.3 billion per annum, but apparently it is up for sale because the Minister of Finance needs money to build this economic engine that he says will function, and which the parliamentary secretary says is resident in Bill C-7. I do not know; I did not see that in Bill C-7, but I hope to find all the things associated with marine liabilities.

I am concerned that what we ought to be doing is looking at the suggestion of the parliamentary secretary of the kinds of investments the government will make for improving the infrastructure of tomorrow. What grand vision do the Conservatives have for the country?

For example, I find some of these ideas from virtually everywhere, and if members will permit me, I will borrow shamelessly from a Canadian resident in Quebec.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Renaud wrote to me on the subject of Canada, a bridge between Asia and Europe. He said we have billions of dollars to spend and now is the time to spend it. He added that we have the political will, the authority, the support of the people, and also the money—money to do what?

I would like to read just one sentence: “Prime Minister Laurier was convinced that a second rail line further away from the American border was essential to Canada's economic prosperity.”

Let us think about this for a moment. Here is an ordinary Canadian who looked back through our history and found an example of a politician who had neither the money nor the political ability to undertake a project in which Canada's development as a whole was the focus of the legislation.

And now this man, this Canadian, Mr. Renaud, tells us that, 100 years later, the Canadian railway system has wasted away.

[*English*]

It got smaller.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Renaud also says:

The technology has not changed much. Operating costs are not competitive and Canadian economic development is overly concentrated on the north-south axis.

This government claims that it will protect and contribute to the growth of our country and boasts about doing it with a bill such as Bill C-7. Just imagine! This bill deals with insurance and legal accountability. And they want us to believe that this bill will move the country forward.

Government Orders

Mr. Renaud continues:

Western oil does not make it to the east coast of Canada but is readily available to Americans.

Just think about that a little. It is available to Americans.

The electrical resources of Quebec and Labrador are more readily available to the U.S. than to the other Canadian provinces, including mine. We are speaking of Quebec's north. The member opposite spoke of a plan for the north, a great plan for all of Canada, in C-7. We have to laugh. Northern Quebec and Labrador are rich in electricity and natural resources that must be transported by waterways to the heart of the continent. Resources from Abitibi and north of Lac-Saint-Jean must necessarily be transported to Quebec City or Montreal, resulting in the development of those cities. It is a praiseworthy objective but it is not the development of the north.

Before looking to the centre of the continent or to Asia, the Government of Canada should propose developing fast transportation arteries on land from one ocean to another, a sort of transcontinental economic bridge between Europe and Asia. That bridge, according to Mr. Renaud, should be less expensive to operate and compatible with Canada's commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The parliamentary secretary says that Bill C-7 is an environmental bill. Here is what Mr. Renaud says. He raises a practical idea:

If it is more energy efficient, the advent of energy transportation will likely generate profit and prosperity for all of Canada. Using hydroelectric power, it will certainly be less harmful to the environment. Strong regions make for a strong Canada, and the federal government should therefore seize the opportunity to get involved in Premier Jean Charest's plan to develop northern Quebec. The northern plan will be cost-effective only if it is supported by east-west transportation arteries.

This is an idea that speaks of collaboration, cooperation and vision in partnership with other governments that have plans to develop the country. The corridor should follow the 51st parallel, a line that runs along the southern edge of Labrador and passes north of the Manicouagan reservoir and Lake Mistassini and along James Bay, reaching the Pacific Ocean north of Vancouver.

That is a pan-Canadian vision. I could keep on reading other people's ideas, but my point is that there are ideas all across this country about what to do with the billions of dollars the government has today, thanks to the opposition. What is their plan? To address gaps in the commercial courts. These are good ideas, but it is shameful to pass them off as economic and environmental plans.

•(1635)

It is also shameful considering the other bills we began studying in committee yesterday.

[*English*]

I get carried away in French. Not being bilingual, I try to do the best I can. I hope members will forgive me for this.

We were talking about Bill C-9. The parliamentary secretary enjoys the greatest support in the House from members of opposition parties as he puts bills before the committee. There is no other parliamentary secretary that enjoys such co-operation. He is going to talk about the transport of dangerous goods. We are talking about technical things. We understand, according to the minister, that

everything is already okay, that everything is already being done. Therefore, we will use Bill C-9 to develop the economy.

That is great. Tell us how that happens. We want to be co-operative. We want to ensure he gets the money, the jurisdiction and the support. All these things are important. What do we do? We make this suggestion. Why not take advantage of the fact that now he talks about the need for security in the country? It has nothing to do with the Olympics in Vancouver, but any excuse is a good excuse at this time. What we need are projects on the table to get the moneys rolling.

One of them might be that we take a look at the security of transmission of goods across the country. I talked for a few moments about passenger rail and about commercial. We talked about moving goods and materials across the country. However, we have another mode as well. Mr. Renaud says that as soon as we build this railway, we will find that we will spend lots of money to build roadways as well because surely development will follow.

It has followed. One of the biggest industries in our country is the trucking industry. There has always been a shortage of truckers because it is a tough job. It might be well paying, but it is a tough job. The parliamentary secretary and his minister said that we needed to ensure that everybody was absolutely secure, that everybody was okay and that they would have to be acceptable by the Americans. If they are not acceptable by the Americans, those trucks will roll up to the border, especially in British Columbia, and the American truckers on the other side will say that those guys are not safe and that they will take over from there. Goodbye Canadian business.

There are vehicle immobilization technologies and there are six companies in Canada that can do this job and do it well. Some of the companies are already familiar with this. They slow down vehicles or completely immobilize them.

I mentioned to the minister, his officials and the parliamentary secretary that we should get some of these people here so we could look at building in regulations that would ensure our trucking industry was fully seized of the importance of putting these into their system and making it part of the carriage of commerce and people. This would suggest that there is at least a minimum bit of a thought in terms of building for an infrastructure for tomorrow.

I know members will want to hear more about this and I will be delighted if they ask me to say more.

•(1640)

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the member for Eglinton—Lawrence for spending most of his time not talking about the actual bill. He is an artist at his craft. However, I want to ask him a question about the bill itself. I draw to the attention of members that we are ratifying two new protocols, one to an international convention from 1992. This one is the supplemental fund protocol to the International Oil Pollution Compensation Funds.

Could the member comment on the mechanism by which contributions will be made to this new supplemental fund and whether he supports that mechanism?

Government Orders

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for underscoring the fact that I touched upon this, that I addressed it and that he lost interest in everything else that was larger than this bill.

He knows we will talk about this in committee. He knows very well that I have already said that on this side of the House, the official opposition will support the mechanisms that bring the Canadian system back up to the international conventions that he has highlighted and that make up a part of the fund from which that liability inherent in this bill will be drawn upon in order to bring the vessel owners and tour operators into line.

How could I possibly give him an answer other than the one he expected?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my Liberal colleague's love for the Conservatives was palpable in his speech. When they tabled their last budget, he also had lovely things to say about the Conservatives' budget. Keep it up, the relationship is really great.

While this budget which he supported provides more than \$400 million for VIA Rail, I got the sense from his speech that perhaps his position regarding that company was not clear. I would appreciate it if he clarified his position.

Yesterday, the premiers of Ontario and Quebec endorsed a feasibility study for a high-speed rail line along the Quebec City-Montreal-Windsor corridor, but said that the Prime Minister was not as much of a fan. Given that \$400 million is at stake, I would like to know what the member's position is. Is he a fan of a high-speed Quebec City-Montreal-Windsor link?

• (1645)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel has talked of love. We are in love with the idea of serving the public and ensuring that, with this service, the people of Canada will have infinite infrastructure possibilities in the future.

I am very much a fan of the idea of a high-speed train, and have been for some twenty years. As the hon. member is aware, I have raised it several times in committee. Why are we so hesitant?

There have already been a number of studies. He knows very well that the costs of past studies add up to over \$2 billion. Twenty or so years ago, when the idea first came up, the total cost for a high-speed train from Quebec City to Windsor would have been around \$4 billion or \$5 billion. Today, we might be talking \$20 billion to \$25 billion, but we do not know.

I do not know why the two provinces, Ontario and Quebec, have not yet completed the studies necessary for the creation of a high-speed train. We know that the Transport Canada studies have been completed. It simply means that the Prime Minister, his Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities have no desire to encourage the creation of a high-speed train. That is too bad.

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have listened carefully to the hon. member's speech. It was a good and

impassioned speech. This member has certainly done a fair bit of research in preparation and it showed. The Premier of Quebec, Jean Charest, talks of developing the north. That is my part of the world. He also talked of developing the Manicouagan rail system in order to develop the north and providing access to the mining industry.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask, through you, for unanimous consent from the House. I know that the hon. member has a lot to say about this. He has a very interesting speech, especially the part concerning the north and rail development in Manicouagan. I would like you to seek consent for the hon. member to have an extra 20 minutes for his speech.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I cannot say whether unanimous consent exists. I can only agree with the member. I am prepared to go on for another 20 minutes or more, if he wishes. However, House procedure requires that other members be given the opportunity to express their opinion about whether they wish to hear more from yours truly.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois about Bill C-7, an act to amend the Marine Liability Act and the Federal Courts Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

For your benefit and that of everyone listening, I would like to read the bill summary:

This enactment amends Parts 3 and 4 of the Marine Liability Act to clarify certain rules of the limitation of liability of owners of ships for maritime claims and liability for the carriage of passengers, in particular the treatment of participants in adventure tourism activities.

It also amends Part 6 of that Act to implement the Protocol of 2003 to the International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage, 1992 as well as the International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage, 2001. The enactment continues, in Part 7, the Ship-source Oil Pollution Fund and modernizes its governance. With respect to Part 8, it includes general provisions relating to the administration and enforcement of offences under that Act and creates a maritime lien for Canadian ship suppliers against foreign vessels and establishes a general limitation period for proceedings not covered by other limitation periods.

Finally, this enactment amends the Federal Courts Act and makes consequential amendments to other Acts.

To begin, I would like to say that the Bloc Québécois will be supporting this bill. Obviously, we cannot be against updating the Marine Liability Act and the Federal Courts Act and implementing the International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage, 2001, as well as the Protocol of 2003 to the International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage, 1992.

There is, however, a problem. The speeches in this House, including that of the parliamentary secretary, talk about urgency. Rightly so. The government has been boasting about signing these conventions. Except that as long as the legislation is not amended, the government cannot implement the conventions.

Government Orders

Yes, we will agree to this and we will help ensure that this law is created through Bill C-7. However, it is important that we discuss some of these issues. Speeches are nice. And it is nice to say, as the parliamentary secretary did, that we need to update and implement these things, and quickly. However, there was the same urgency in the last Parliament, and the Conservative government decided to call an election for purely political and partisan reasons, even though the Prime Minister had passed legislation on fixed election dates. Back then, there was no problem. There was no urgency about this bill. That was in September 2008. It was in 2001 and 2003 that we signed the conventions that we cannot implement today.

The question I asked the parliamentary secretary is important. For our part, we are working. As a responsible political party, we have always done our part on all the committees of the House of Commons. As you know, we are the only party that defends the interests of Quebeckers.

Given that we have the St. Lawrence, a magnificent tool, we cannot be opposed to this bill. The problem is that we have to be able to implement this bill as soon as possible, before there is a disaster. For example, there could be a shipping accident that creates a natural disaster, and we would not be able to determine who is liable or we would not have the money to clean up the parts of the river contaminated by an oil spill.

What we in the Bloc Québécois are saying is yes, we want to get down to work, but we need to guarantee results. Otherwise, we create expectations, and the general public could well pay the price one day, just because a Conservative prime minister decided for partisan reasons that it was time to call an election. The Bloc Québécois had good reason to support a coalition even though it was not part of the coalition government: we wanted to work.

• (1650)

That was the goal. We were not part of the coalition government, but we wanted to move things forward at a time of economic crisis, and we guaranteed a stable government for the term of the agreement.

It is important to understand that when the Bloc Québécois gets up in the House of Commons, it is acting in the interest of Quebeckers. This bill, which is very important, should survive. We should do everything we can to make sure that happens, to achieve our goal, which is to implement this bill. After analyzing this bill, no one can be opposed to amending the Marine Liability Act or making companies liable.

During long debates in this House, we had the opportunity to discuss shipowners' property. Moreover, a former member of this House owned ships that flew different flags, none of them Canadian. Often, shipowners do this for civil liability reasons. It allows them to hire cheaper labour, but it is primarily for civil liability reasons. We need to address this situation. Too many multinationals are making huge profits and shirking their responsibilities. These conventions were signed for a reason.

When representatives of shipowners were asked about this in committee, they told us that that is how the industry's market works. So, yes, that is what the industry must do to remain competitive. It must employ workers at lower wages and make sure it has as little

civil liability as possible in the event of an accident or anything that could jeopardize the business or eat into its profits.

They operate vessels that belong to them under different flags and use tax havens, and so on. When asked in committee, they very candidly told us that that was the industry's role and that was how it works in the industry. It is time to clean up the industry. When disasters and accidents happen, or when enormous sums of money have to be paid to decontaminate or clean up waters, all too often the companies disappear, the subsidiaries vanish and there is no one to take responsibility. Such legislation is therefore very welcome.

This brings me to the work that must be done on such a bill. The parliamentary secretary told us that he drafted this bill with the industry. However, in committee, we must be able to call the necessary witnesses: first of all the industry, to ensure that discussions did in fact take place, but also everyone who might have a direct or indirect connection to the bill. This will allow us to see if the bill will be effective. It is indeed important to add measures and create a compensation fund, but is that enough?

Researchers and academic experts in the field have analyzed what was happening around the world. It is important that we do a good job. These conventions were adopted in 2001 and 2003. However, it is now 2009 and we still do not have any legislation to implement them. If we implement one, it should at least be the right one. That is what the Bloc Québécois will work towards throughout the committee process.

It is important to realize that this is the fourth bill that the Conservatives have sent to the committee. A certain order is required. It is fine by us, the committee members. However, with each bill we should at least ensure that the appropriate steps are taken. Thus, witnesses are invited, and so forth. It is as though they want to pass, in the next three weeks, all the work done by this government in the past three years so that they can then call an election.

• (1655)

That is why I am asking these questions. Many bills are being referred to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. We are prepared to do our job. That is not a problem. However, we want to understand and try to guess why this all has to be done in a mad rush. In the last session, when in power, the Conservatives had to set aside many bills because they decided to opt for an early election and contravene their own legislation. We are not required to adopt any old thing just to please them.

Government Orders

That worries me a little. The Liberals have become buddy-buddy with the Conservatives to the point that it is even embarrassing. That is their decision. It does not matter except that we see them going into the committees. For example, I am thinking of the meetings of the Standing Committee on Finance held this week. I briefly watched the proceedings on television and I saw how they cozy up to them, so much so that they have no backbone left. I watched Quebec members, including the member for Bourassa. It was quite something to see them turn themselves inside out and adopt things that they would never before have accepted in their lives. All because they want to save their seats in the House of Commons. I find that hard to take.

I repeat, the Bloc Québécois is doing what it has to do. We may not be buddy-buddy, but we like to work in committee to advance the interests of Quebecers. We have always done so, I have ever since the first day I was here back in 2000, and so did those who were here before me. We are a highly responsible party. We can move ahead on files provided we can get a good look at them. But when we get four bills rushed at us simultaneously, that creates problems. We will not be able to pass them all on the same day, and choices will have to be made.

I will leave it to the parliamentary secretary to speak to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. It was fine, he met with us twice. The first time he had a lot to say. We used the text he had distributed just about everywhere in Quebec. The second time he had just about nothing to say. We will see what happens the next time. People who think that Parliament is a boring place where nothing happens are wrong. They need to look at what gets done in committee to understand that MPs are not sitting doing nothing, they are in Parliament to make changes.

As for Bill C-7 on marine liability, there have been examples. We have been pretty lucky in Quebec and along the St. Lawrence. With the exception of an incident ten years or so ago, we have been spared as far as accidents go, touch wood. Yes, we have been spared but this is nonetheless a very worrisome situation. The ships that ply our waters are getting bigger and bigger all the time. When damage does occur, it will be bigger too.

There needs to be an update, if only of the fines, the penalties or compensation to be paid. The polluter pay principle is part of this bill. Where the environment is concerned, the Bloc Québécois has always defended that principle. As for the Conservatives—and I was pleased to see it just now—the parliamentary secretary got really worked up about the polluter pay principle. You never can tell with the Conservatives. When it suits them, it is polluter pay, and when it does not, it is pay the polluter.

Finally, in terms of the environment, the Conservatives are dreaming up intensity targets with 2006 as the base year when the Kyoto protocol uses 1990 as the base year. All of the efforts made by Quebec's manufacturing industry since 1990, with the aim of being eligible to sell credits on the international market, will be for nothing. The year 2006 has been chosen because the oil companies did nothing between 1990 and 2006. They will be rewarded. Those that polluted the most in comparison to the 1990 Kyoto standard will be the ones that will receive the biggest reward. It is the concept of polluter-paid. They will receive help to reach the goals.

The Conservatives know it and the Prime Minister has tried hard to justify it.

● (1700)

I listened to his reaction to the speech by the President of the United States, Mr. Obama. The Prime Minister said that intensity targets and absolute targets are one and the same. Experts know that they are not the same. Of course, for the public who do not have the opportunity to follow all of these issues every day, it is not easy to keep up.

I had the opportunity to tour the regions with the leader of the Bloc Québécois in January. The mayor of Rivière-du-Loup told us that with absolute targets he would be able to sell his credits because he has a landfill and has reduced his greenhouse gas emissions. He made a point of telephoning the European carbon exchange and was told that he is not eligible because he is in Canada and Canada does not conform to the Kyoto protocol. So he will never be able to access the carbon exchange. Currently, it is the only exchange in the world that applies. There is the Chicago Exchange, and European exchanges, but no Canadian businesses are eligible because Canada does not conform to the Kyoto protocol and does not participate in it.

The Prime Minister is trying to set up his own carbon exchange with 2006 as the base year. He is probably trying to convince the U.S. to do the same. Members will have gathered, however, that a Canada-only carbon exchange would carry a lower cost, given that there are much fewer businesses capable of buying carbon credits in Canada than there are worldwide. The mayor of Rivière-du-Loup could have made \$1 million from the sale of his credits on the world market. On the Canadian market, he could get \$200,000 or so for his credits. This would mean lost profits of \$800,000 for him because the Government of Canada decided to set up its own carbon exchange with a much smaller market and, thus, much smaller amounts being paid for carbon credits.

I chose the example of a municipality which would need that \$800,000 or \$1 million for its citizens, because there is a landfill in that municipality, which is something of an inconvenience. The fact is that, sometimes, offsetting that with credits that benefit the community helps make up for other situations which have a negative impact on the community.

We have heard the parliamentary secretary praise the polluter pay principle. I hope we will see this trend continue with all this government's bills and decisions. I encourage the parliamentary secretary to work, especially with his colleague, the environment minister, and even more so with the Prime Minister, to make absolutely sure that the same polluter pay principle will be applied. Of course, the tar sands are in large part located in the parliamentary secretary's riding, which tells me that he himself will have a hard time—

● (1705)

Mr. Brian Jean: All of it, 100%...

Mr. Mario Laframboise: All of it. I am glad to hear that, but maybe it is time to sell the polluter-pay principle to the companies developing the oil sands in his riding and use 1990 as the reference year. Then, we would be proud to stand up in this House and congratulate him on the great things he had done for the environment, which is something we cannot really do now.

Government Orders

But he is a great guy. I have a lot of fun with the parliamentary secretary in committee, and we are going to keep on working. Still, in politics, we have to make choices that go against what the people want.

In Quebec, our paper mills, our manufacturing plants, our aluminum smelters have made major efforts. They are going through an unprecedented economic crisis, and the government has done nothing about it. The money that has been invested in the manufacturing and forestry industries is really not much compared to what has been invested in the automotive industry. When we think that the solution would be to sell carbon credits, we can only stand up in this House and defend Quebecers' interests. I congratulate all my Bloc Québécois colleagues, because that is what they do best, and that is why, election after election, we are always re-elected with a large majority.

[*English*]

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the member across for his comments. We have certainly heard a lot of verbiage here this afternoon. I thought we were debating Bill C-7, the Marine Liability Act, so perhaps we can get back to some discussion on that issue.

It has been made clear by the parliamentary secretary that the bill ratifies two international conventions. It clarifies the liability for shipowners. We have stakeholders who are very supportive of it. Major shippers are supportive. It clarifies issues regarding insurance and liability. The marine adventure tourism industry is supportive because it removes onerous liability regulations that have been in place since 2001, which is certainly a considerable length of time that these operators have had to deal with these onerous regulations.

We also know that there was little interest shown when conventions were tabled for comment earlier this year. Now we are here and the questions are being asked: Why do we want to proceed now? What will this do?

Very clearly, the bill is linked to the government's environmental agenda and the mandate to focus on initiatives that address marine pollution. When we are standing here today debating Bill C-7, we need to remember those things.

We are talking about ratifying international conventions. We are looking at taking positive steps toward ensuring we have the most comprehensive liability issues. My question to the member opposite would be, what is his position on the bill and would he support it and move it forward with these positive improvements that are included in it?

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, it sounds as though my colleague was not listening to me, because I said that we would support the bill and call the necessary witnesses. Now that I have her full attention, I will go on.

Her party might have to make some choices. This is the fourth bill the Conservative Party has referred to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, so there will have to be an order of preference. This is not the first bill to be introduced. I understand that the matter is urgent. The MOUs were signed in 2001

and 2003. The Conservatives have been in power since 2006. They decided not to make this an urgent matter during the last Parliament, but now they are making it an urgent matter.

I asked the parliamentary secretary to make sure that his Prime Minister did not call an election so that we could complete our study of this bill. During the last Parliament, they passed fixed election date legislation again, then failed to comply. The member herself did not comply.

The Conservatives have to get their act together. Sometimes problems can be solved when the right hand knows what the left hand is doing.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel a question.

He accepted the parliamentary secretary's invitation to talk about the environment, emissions and so on. The government members asked him a question about whether he would support a plan for the environment.

Is he aware of the government's environment and greenhouse gas emissions reduction plan—if there is such a thing? Is this the first time he has heard the government talk about a bill or a plan involving the environment? All of these things are being buried in a bill that has nothing to do with the environment or emissions, a bill that merely addresses liability—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please, I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence, but I must allow the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel a few minutes to respond to the question.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. Liberal colleague for his very appropriate question.

In his speech, the parliamentary secretary talked about a bill for the environment. Furthermore, the question asked earlier by the Conservative member referred to an environmental bill. But this is not a bill for the environment. It is a bill to establish insurance and compensation funds in the event of a pollution problem. This in no way solves the environmental problems. It is a problem involving pollution, oil residues and so on. Thus, we are talking about a liability system to find the guilty parties and determine who should pay. We are talking about compensation funds that will be used to pay the cost of environmental cleanups. Thus, it is not an environmental bill; it is a bill to deal with pollution.

My colleague is quite right; the Conservatives are making this bill into a huge environmental project. There is a problem with their position.

• (1715)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also have a question for my hon. colleague across the floor.

Government Orders

[English]

The fact is that this bill would increase the compensation amount for tanker oil spills up to \$1.5 billion. That is pursuant to the international convention that the bill would ratify. In addition, it would increase compensation amounts for oil spills from other ships up to \$250 million. This is all to do with combatting pollution.

I suppose it is possible for the opposition to ask why are we turning this into an environmental bill. It seems perfectly clear that what we are trying to do is to increase protection for the environment.

I listened carefully to my friend's comments and through the whole of them I did not hear him raise any objection to these apparently laudable praiseworthy goals for this legislation.

I would like to know from my colleague opposite whether he thinks there is anyone, outside of perhaps the big polluters who might disagree with this kind of protection for our waterways, who disagrees with it. If he does not know of anyone who disagrees with it, does he disagree with it? If he does not disagree with it, will he help us get it passed so we can move on to other issues?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, for the third time, I repeat, we agree with the bill. That said, we would like to call some witnesses. We will call professors and scientists who are experts in the field to appear before the committee. However, his position is much more realistic, in that he is talking about pollution and compensation.

It would be nice if he could speak to the parliamentary secretary and the Conservative member who asked me a question earlier, because they were talking about an environmental bill. I am not the one who mentioned that; they did. It would be nice if the Conservatives would talk to each other. That could clear up some problems.

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the Marine Liability Act amendments.

In my research on this particular subject, it appears that this legislation has been on the books for consideration for some time. In May 2005, Transport Canada put forward a maritime law reform discussion paper in which it put forward many of the points that are in this bill.

Many of these protocols have been in existence, as we have pointed out, since 1976, 1992, 2001 and 2003, and they have not been ratified. Many of the aspects within them have been implemented within the Marine Liability Act in one form or another. We have seen that Canada, over the years, has taken international conventions from international marine liability work and has implemented them into its legislation but has not ratified the actual conventions in many cases. These are amendments to the law that would bring things up to date.

Under the Constitution of Canada, Parliament has the exclusive authority to make laws in relation to navigation and shipping but the provincial legislatures have the exclusive legislative authority to

make laws in relation to property and to civil rights. It is worth keeping in mind this division on power because it does play out in terms of some of the issues around liability and some of the issues that are important in this bill.

When we consider what the bill has done under part 4 of the act, it sets a per capita limit of liability that would limit the liability for the carriage of passengers, in particular the treatment of participants in adventure tourism activities. That was something in the act that was of great concern to adventure tourism operators. In 1992, legislation under the Marine Liability Act caused the waivers used by many adventure tourism people in their businesses, waivers to limit their liability for their customers engaged in recreational activities where there was some degree of hazard, to become invalid.

This bill attempts to bring those back so that these waivers for the adventure tourism sector can be used and are valid. This is a very important thing and certainly will be a subject of discussion at committee when this bill moves forward. We would like to see it move forward. It has been many years in getting to this point.

If there is blame, we can blame the previous administration, the Liberal government. Obviously, it formulated the Maritime law reform discussion paper with the questions that were carried out at that time and we can see that many of these conventions, not ratified over many years, are in place. Governments, obviously, have been slow in moving on this.

I would like to understand in committee why governments have been slow and get to why this has not happened in a fashion that would have provided some of the protections that are now being put forward. That may clear the air in much of this regard.

Other parts of the bill will amend part 6 of the act to implement the protocol for the International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage, 1992; as well as the International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage, 2001. It would change the liability regime in the ship source oil pollution fund. It would do a number of things that would change the way major things like oil spills in our waters are handled, but will it actually provide the protections required?

• (1720)

Interestingly enough, the parliamentary secretary indicated that the fund that is established will provide perhaps \$1.5 billion toward oil spill remediation but when we look at the *Exxon Valdez*, we see that the total cost for the cleanup of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill 20 years ago and onward was some \$2.5 billion.

Therefore, even within the context of what we are putting forward here, we have examples of accidents that have cost more to clean up than what would be available under this fund.

The fund, interestingly enough, if it is drawn down, will need to be replenished by states that import oil on a levy basis. Within the act, there are various considerations about who will be liable, what conditions the liability will extend to the owners and what conditions the owners will find themselves without the wherewithal to provide compensation to the people who have the oil spill damage.

Private Members' Business

We are entering into a complex business with this bill and these conventions. I look forward to having the opportunity to have expert witnesses come before us and present their case for these conventions. These conventions have not been adopted quickly by our government. We have been operating under a particular regime for some considerable time.

I talked about oil spills the other day and, in the case of Arctic waters, I mentioned that we do not have the capacity or the ability to deal with oil spills in waters that have more than 35% ice content. We cannot get the oil out of the water with the present technology. When we talk about the development of the Arctic and the Arctic waters and bringing in more ships and commercial activity, such as drilling rigs, service vessels, and transshipping through the North-west Passage, which, even when it is ice free, is a very dangerous passageway, this is not wide open ocean. It has shallow areas with much of the charting that is not conventionally carried by ships. We have significant concern in the Arctic about what is going to happen with shipping in there. We do not have the capacity to deal with oil spills in waters that have a great percentage of ice but that is the kind of water that the ships will be going through.

When we talk about Canada's ability to act in an environmental sense, which the parliamentary secretary suggested the bill would somehow deal with the environment and protect the environment from damage, in reality it would simply assign costs, in a variety of ways, to either funds that are internationally set up or to provide mechanisms to identify and to make the shipowners who caused the spill responsible for that.

This is not really an environmental bill. It is a bill about who will be responsible. We already have some provisions in our acts to deal with some of those aspects.

When we come to actually examining this bill, do we want to push ahead with all speed on these provisions or do we want to understand completely what they will mean to us, as a country, in relationship to the vast ocean and coastal areas we have from sea to sea in Canada?

• (1725)

We want to make sure that we cover all these issues in great detail as the bill moves forward. For that reason we are quite interested in seeing the bill move forward to committee. Dealing with the bill in committee is not going to be a slam dunk affair. The bill has a variety of ramifications and it has been around for a considerable period of time. We want to understand why the bill has not come forward before this time. What are the positive aspects of these international conventions? What are the things that may not be as we want them to be for our country?

We need Bill C-7, but we need to work on it. I am sure all of the members on the transport committee will be looking forward to spending time on this legislation. As my Bloc colleague on committee pointed out, this is the fourth bill that is working its way through the system and the transport committee. We will have to set priorities for handling these bills. We have to make sure that they move forward. At the same time we cannot ignore the details of such an important bill.

The Deputy Speaker: We will have questions and comments at another time.

It being 5:30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

YOUTH VOLUNTARY SERVICE

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.) moved:

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities be instructed to consider the introduction in Canada of a national voluntary service policy for young people by analyzing existing programs and using the work done by the Voluntary Sector Initiative in 2003 as its point of departure; by holding public hearings; and by presenting a report to the House no later than October 2009 that would contain among other things a review of similar policies in the rest of the world and a summary of the evidence heard.

He said: Mr. Speaker, when I ran for office, I made promises to the people of Papineau. I promised that I would be a strong voice for them in this House and that I would be equal to the task when it comes to taking steps that will really help the people in my community. This economic crisis brings huge challenges, but at the same time huge opportunities.

I have often said that the strength of Papineau resides in its spirit of people helping people. As we face this crisis, mutual help is becoming increasingly important. What is good for Papineau is also good for Canada. It is one of the values that bring us together. Among Canadian values is being there for one another. That is precisely what is needed these days.

[*English*]

If an economic crisis is difficult, it also represents an opportunity for the government to help Canadians. However, the way we choose to help Canadians needs to be effective in the immediate, but has to also carry through a lasting impact that will make a difference in the generations to come.

The opportunity to invest in our communities and non-profit organizations, that do such a tremendous job already of helping out Canadians in times of need, is extraordinarily important. We need to make sure that our community organizations and the charitable entities, that work so hard to help out our seniors, youth, people in difficulty, working families or single mothers, receive stable sources of help.

At the same time, on the other hand, we have young people across this country who are facing a crisis of relevance. They are asking questions about how they fit in to this increasingly globalized, massive world, where every day they are told in different ways that they do not matter, that one day they will be important but for now they just need to keep quiet and do their thing. They turn to us and ask what that thing is and we have no answers for them.

We need to look at investing in our youth as something that is essential, not just for them but for all of society. If we can pair up young people who are seeking for ways to matter in our society with communities and community organizations, that need help to allow Canadians to get through the tough times that exist particularly now but will exist always in good years and in bad, then we are creating a way that Canada can be stronger in a genuine, long-term fashion.

Young people get a bad rap often for being apathetic, disconnected and cynical about the world. The reality is that sometimes they are a little cynical, apathetic and frustrated at the way the world is around them, but it is not because they do not care about the world. On the contrary, it is because they care so much that they are deeply frustrated that they do not have ways to make the world a better place. They do not have a voice that gets heard to shape the world that will be theirs some day, they keep being told.

The motion I am putting before the House is to ask the human resources committee to study best practices from around the world, to listen to community partners, provincial partners, municipal partners, NGOs, universities, schools, people who work with young people and young people themselves, all of these groups, and come up with a national service policy for youth in Canada.

• (1735)

A national youth service policy would simply say to any young Canadian who wanted to serve their country, we will provide them the opportunity to do so. It seems like an obvious thing, that if a young person would want to serve, they would be given opportunities to do so. But the reality is that tens of thousands of young people apply to programs and organizations across the country, organizations that have their impact nationally, locally, provincially, regionally, and see themselves turned away from the help they can offer simply because of lack of funding and lack of a willingness by the government, by the House, to invest in our young people to give them the tools, the skills, and the understanding that they can be powerful, committed, and engaged citizens.

The details of this policy need to be worked out in consultation. I am certainly not pretending that I have all the answers. Far from it, but there are many Canadian organizations, individuals and groups, who fought long and hard about ways to involve young Canadians in active service, in engaged long-term volunteerism, that allows this country to meet the needs of so many communities and individuals who find themselves struggling.

[*Translation*]

It is important to understand that I am proposing that we establish a policy to ensure that any young person who wants to serve our country is given the opportunity to do so.

We are not working towards a program to that end. We are not saying that this is what Canada, its communities and its provinces need. We are simply establishing a framework to give young people a choice, many choices. They could see how they would like to serve and there would be a framework to approve the provinces, municipalities, NGOs and charitable community organizations, which would then find volunteers—young Canadians who perhaps live in that community or who perhaps come from the other side of the country—to provide all Canadians with the services that are so well delivered by community organizations.

Private Members' Business

It is not up to us here to say that a certain region needs young people to plant trees, or that another region needs this or that. It is a question of providing a means to respond to the needs of our communities.

• (1740)

[*English*]

Providing communities with volunteer efforts for young people to serve is a way for the government to respond to the very real needs that our communities face across the country. This is an extraordinary opportunity.

Many different models and choices need to be looked at and should eventually be offered.

First of all, what is service? There are two great ideas out there about how service to one's country would look. There is the typical model of the gap year, which is in place in many parts of Europe, including England, where the Russell commission report came out a number of years ago recommending the adoption of exactly this, a national policy on youth service.

Within a gap year, typically between the end of high school and the beginning of post-secondary education or one's career, young people take time to travel and work in various communities. They learn a number of jobs and skills that will not necessarily be the careers they will be choosing, but that will form habits of engagement in their communities that one hopes they will keep for the rest of their lives as active, engaged adults. The gap year provides an opportunity for young people to figure out what they like to do and often what they do not want to do. When young people go out into the world and start becoming powerful agents of change in their communities, those experiences make a big difference.

There is also the military reserve-style model, in which civic service would engage young people for a weekend a month during the summer over a number of years. That allows for training, framework and accessibility to a pool of young people who could be called into action with the training they receive. Service organizations can target inner cities, rural areas and small towns. They could target the far north and aboriginal reserves. We could be offering to young Canadians the opportunity to serve in many different ways, including overseas service. The engagement that our young Canadians can have, faced with this globalized world, is significant, and we need to look at ways in which national youth service would also encourage overseas service.

This motion has as its object the beginning of a dialogue and the beginning of a formal conversation here in Parliament about what we need our young people to grow up to be and what we hope the adult citizens they will become will hold dear as Canadian values and responsibilities.

How we reach out to our young people and provide them with opportunities to be relevant is extraordinarily important. We cannot just sit back and hope that one day they will feel like volunteering unless we demonstrate to them that we are willing to invest in them to provide them with opportunities to serve.

Private Members' Business

Every single person who sits in the House of Commons and has the honour of being here knows the value of service.

● (1745)

[Translation]

All of us here in the House understand the importance of service and of serving one's country. We are all extremely lucky to be here, lucky that people encouraged us and made us understand that it is important to be involved and to be present.

[English]

I deeply hope that this measure will allow more young people to understand the responsibilities of service and the extraordinary satisfaction that comes with being able to serve.

Oftentimes we say we want our young people to be our leaders of tomorrow. That means nothing unless we give them the tools to be leaders today. If we reach out to our young people right now and provide them with the tools to make a difference, Mr. Speaker, I ask you and everyone in this House to imagine the kind of Canada we would be building together.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member on winning the lottery and having his motion presented here today. I would also like to congratulate the member on the recent addition to his family of his son Xavier. I think that's a wonderful thing, and it is something we have in common. I am hoping that being parents is not all we have in common, but I am starting to wonder.

The hon. member spoke about young people having an opportunity to serve. That is a wonderful thing, engaging the youth of our country and building on their skills and their experiences to make them the leaders of tomorrow.

He then went on to say that these young people look for opportunities to serve but find out that there is no funding for programs. The turnaround is that it actually sounds more as though they are looking for opportunities for their country to serve them.

I am just wondering if the member would like to clarify this in the context of the words of a great former U.S. president, who said, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country".

Through this motion, is the member actually trying to get at a situation through which we are providing an opportunity for Canadians to support our country, or for the country to support Canadians?

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question indeed is a good one.

The reality, however, is that young people do not always have the opportunity to serve. Going to northern Canada to help out in a community that needs help is not something many young people can do on their own.

The idea of recognizing and valuing a service framework is such that young people would buy into a culture of service because there would be opportunities for it. About 10,000 young people a year apply to a program like Katimavik to try to serve. Unfortunately,

only 1,000 of them get to serve through our national youth service program, because the funding simply is not there.

What do they do? Some of them volunteer in their communities, on and off, but many of them are in school and many of them are working in part-time jobs because they have to pay the rent or allow for their education. What we need to do is give them opportunities that are structured.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on the addition to his family.

I actually worked in the trenches, if you will, for the program he was talking about, Katimavik. When he was sitting on the board of directors in a position of some influence and power, I had discussions with him about how the program, even as it was operating then, was not well funded enough to not burn out the staff every year. The turnover rate in that program is exceptionally high.

This opportunity, this lottery draft and pick, was presented before him as a new member with great expectations, I am sure, from all places. He has moved a study of youth programs, something that can actually happen at the committee level. I am sure he well knows that any member of any committee can move a study. They are wonderful things. We study things, and that is dramatically important to the lives of Canadians.

However, there was an opportunity for the first private member's bill to be a bill and to move government policy and shift the way government treats our young people. It could have had so much more impact.

I wonder if he is reflecting at all on this opportunity to shift the debate and the way that we deal with young people in Canada, which would be well supported. Is this not a failed moment?

● (1750)

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, obviously when I came in and realized that I had this lottery win, I got all excited. I said, "Great. I'm going to force the government to implement a national youth service policy". Then I found out that we cannot move things that require the spending of money.

Therefore the best goal and the most exciting thing for me is to get this room talking about national service, to get this room talking about youth and about the opportunity to invest in them, and to open a dialogue with all these organizations that are frustrated because they cannot seem to get the government and previous governments to invest adequately in young people.

The opportunity to start an important dialogue to get people going on this is what the motion is all about. It seems perhaps modest, and I could have made a bigger splash in a different way, but I want to get something done, and that requires dialogue.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Papineau speaks with eloquence and passion in that which he believes.

In my view, volunteerism transcends gender and age and we need to look at it from a wider perspective than only youth. However, we do know that youth play a very important part.

As my colleagues will no doubt agree, volunteering increases skills and knowledge. It helps us to network. It strengthens our ties with neighbours and our communities.

Almost without exception, volunteers will tell us that giving and helping others is more satisfying and gives a sense of satisfaction that is greater, many times, than receiving.

As any MP knows from experience, there is a vast number of good causes in need of good people to help out within any community, regardless of where it may be.

Volunteers are on the front lines in our constituencies, whether they live in rural areas, small towns or major urban centres. Volunteers run food banks and homeless shelters. They work at the fire hall, at the hospitals, they coach and mentor young people in countless sports and activities and they spend time with those in nursing homes.

For example, in my riding of Souris—Moose Mountain, Bob Burns of Estevan, Saskatchewan, who just turned 79 years of age, has put in countless hours in community service, including coaching and mentoring youth people. He received the commemorative medal for the Centennial of Saskatchewan from the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan, a medal awarded to individuals who have made significant contribution to our province. Bob has completed 58 seasons of umping baseball. He has promoted umpire classes. He was inducted to the Saskatchewan Baseball Hall of Fame in 2003.

Another person who comes to mind is Bill Baryluk who has committed hours to fundraising and other tasks for the Knights of Columbus as well as Albert Petrash, many Legionnaires and a host of others.

In the community of Estevan and Weyburn, scores of volunteers are involved in the Estevan United Way Telethon and the Weyburn and District Communithon. Estevan has been the first in Canada to top its goal 31 times in the telethon's 32 year history. Volunteers came from across the community. Volunteers worked cameras, answered phones and provided a host of other services. John Deadlock, one of Estevan's founding members, who is instrumental in the setup, has since retired. Other names come to mind, such as Brian Senchuck, Larry Elash, Duane Chipley, à Weyburn, Nick Coronick, Allin et C.J. Mainel.

Weyburn and district utilizes over a thousand volunteers in their annual campaign. Volunteers are very important to what happens in our communities. My constituents are making a real difference in our communities. I want to thank and commend them for their time and efforts.

The collective impact of these individuals' efforts is enormous. A 2004 survey conducted by Statistics Canada found that close to 12 million Canadians generously gave their time, talents and energy to improve the lives of their fellow citizens.

Volunteers each contribute an average of 168 hours annually. That adds up to almost two billion hours. That is the equivalent to one million full-time jobs. Volunteerism is a huge area that needs attention.

The numbers are equally impressive when we put a price on the contribution of the not-for-profit sector to the economy. In 2005 the

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value added of the not-for-profit sector, not including hospitals, universities and colleges, amounted to \$31 billion. This represents 2.4% of the total Canadian economy. Clearly, volunteers and the not-for-profit sector are a significant, positive, economic and social force in Canada.

There can be no question of the value, nor of the necessity, of volunteering to our country. Nor is there any doubt about the need to bring new people, young people, into the ranks of Canada's volunteers.

As my earlier example has shown, many of Canada's long-standing volunteers are now in their seventies. They have given more than their fair share to the betterment of our communities and our country. Other, younger Canadians need to step up and help with this crucial work. It is very important for us to encourage the younger generation to take up the torch and continue the tremendous contribution and efforts made by today's seniors in our voluntary sector.

Indeed, that is why our government funds numerous youth programs and encourages young Canadians to use their talents in their communities.

• (1755)

For example, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada runs the Canada summer jobs program that provides young people with summer work experience in organizations such as not-for-profits. My constituency of Souris—Moose Mountain has certainly endorsed this program and benefited from it.

Thanks to our economic action plan, this program will receive an additional two year targeted funding of \$10 million per year to enable more employers to hire summer students.

I am pleased to note that the value of this program is appreciated on both sides of the House, especially by my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, who indicated in committee the other week that he thought it is an outstanding program and one of his favourite projects. We are glad to have the support of the lead critic.

Other federal departments also have programs for youth service, including the junior rangers and cadet programs of the Department of National Defence and young Canada works of Parks Canada.

Our economic action plan announced a one-time grant of \$15 million to the YMCA and the YWCA to place youth in internships in not-for-profit organizations with a focus on environmental projects. I am sure my colleagues can get behind that one as well.

Creating a strong, resilient society through voluntary efforts requires the efforts of Canadians across the country and across all age groups.

Recent research indicates that volunteer behaviour in our country has been changing. While older volunteers remain consistent in their volunteer commitments, volunteering by baby boomers and young people is generally more short-term and sporadic.

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Young people have the energy and passion that we want and they need to be encouraged to volunteer. Building habits of volunteerism while younger will encourage volunteerism for years to come. As more and more of our existing group of hardworking volunteers are no longer able to contribute, younger Canadians need to step up and continue that work.

People of the baby boomer generation particularly have a wealth of experience and expertise to offer and many of these people are entering their retirement years. This huge segment of the population offers a tremendous source of new volunteers.

We believe that expanding the scope of the proposed review to look at volunteerism across a range of demographic groups is something worth considering, given these realities.

The review could consider the value of volunteering to Canadian society. Charities, service clubs, foundations and aid agencies across the country are always on the lookout for new volunteers and more resources.

The not-for-profit sector acts as a hub for volunteering, but often lacks the required infrastructure to recruit and train volunteers. We know that tens of thousands of our charitable community and not-for-profit organizations rely solely on the contributions of volunteers to keep going. Without this generosity from their volunteers and contributors, tens of thousands of these service and not-for-profit organizations would find themselves mere paper entities unable to help anyone.

This review could consider what sort of conditions best encourage the giving of time and money to charitable, volunteer and not-for-profit organizations and how we could provide more of that encouragement.

Given the importance of volunteering to many community programs and services across Canada, the standing committee's study of current and new means of raising the profile of volunteer efforts among younger Canadians may be a worthwhile effort.

While we are not opposed to the motion per se as proposed by the member for Papineau, the member will know that should the motion be adopted, it in no way binds the committee to undertake this study, let alone report back to the House in any prescribed timeframe. That is simply reality of the way our rules are set up to work in this place.

Parliamentary tradition respects the convention that committees are masters of their own agendas and affairs. As such, government support for the motion should in no way, if it is given, be interpreted as the government wishing to usurp the HUMA committee's right to undertake studies on its own volition and on its own timeframe. The committee will do what it deems best.

Should the member's motion pass, I look forward to considering it in concert with my colleagues on committee, alongside the business that we have already decided to pursue and any other business the House sees fit to send to committee.

I am thankful for the opportunity to rise in the House to recognize the tremendous efforts made by literally millions of Canadians. Their voluntary and charitable work and contributions help untold numbers of their fellow Canadians and help build and maintain the bonds of community and Canadian society.

I am looking forward to where this will go. I believe it will be more expansive than the member envisions, although our youth are a critical and important part of the process.

As I said at the beginning, volunteerism extends and goes beyond boundaries of gender, of age and is something that is important to all of us.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicolas Dufour (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me today to take the floor and present my position and that of the Bloc Québécois on motion No. 299 tabled by the member for Papineau. This motion proposes the creation of a national voluntary service policy for young people, although this is clearly Quebec's jurisdiction.

Should I also remind the member for Papineau that Quebec has already developed its own youth action strategy by consulting 1,200 young people and groups from all sectors. In addition, several programs make it possible for Quebec's youth to be open to the world. The motion to put in place a national voluntary service for young people is a duplication of what is already being done in Quebec and clearly infringes on Quebec's and the provinces' jurisdiction.

What the motion under discussion today is proposing is that we set aside Quebec's policies and its area of jurisdiction and that we put forward a national policy as called for by the Katimavik organization in the document *Engaging Youth in the National Civic Service*.

Katimavik appeals to the federal government to commit to a long-term funding strategy. This would enable us to better respond to the ever increasing demand for the program...This would confirm Canada's commitment to national youth service and the importance of the successful integration of our youth in the social and economic fabric of our society.

Although I agree with the principle of integrating young people into society and assisting non-profit organizations is laudable, the fact remains that a national policy is not within the federal jurisdiction. Quebec has its own policy. If it wishes to fund Katimavik it will choose to do so without the federal government dictating its priorities. In addition, Quebec's 2006-09 youth strategy already provides support to Katimavik for its Eco-Internship, a voluntary service program focused on the environment, through a \$1.4 million subsidy for implementing an environmental project to be deployed in several Quebec regions.

So Quebec has made its own choices, using its own expertise, in its own areas of jurisdiction. The Bloc Québécois agrees that it is important to fund a youth policy to help our young people develop their full potential and acquire the necessary tools for the future of our societies, but that is a Quebec responsibility. The Quebec nation is acting on this and wants the federal government to transfer to it the funds required so that it may invest them as it chooses.

In “Canadian Views on Volunteer Service and a National Youth Service Policy”, a report on a survey carried out by Katimavik, several of the survey questions reveal other intrusions by this national policy. Example: “Do you think that having high school or university students do a certain amount of compulsory community service hours as a condition of graduating is a good or bad idea?” This question deals with imposing volunteer hours for students before they can get their diplomas. What makes the feds think they can decide about curricula in Quebec and the provinces?

Quebec has exclusive authority over education. The 1867 Constitution Act is clear on this in sections 93 and 93A. However, despite this clarity, the federal government has increasingly intruded into this field and is trying to impose its own priorities by any means possible.

The federal initiatives proposed by the federal government have never been disavowed by the Conservative government which not only is pursuing its initiatives but trying to add more.

The 1998 budget was a milestone year in the federal government's desire to trample over Quebec's jurisdiction over education, with its millennium scholarships program. Even today, this represents one of the worst intrusions by the federal government into areas of exclusive Quebec and provincial jurisdiction. It took two years for an agreement to be reached between the millennium foundation and Quebec in order to recognize the specific nature of Quebec, which has the most generous loan and scholarship system in all of North America. However, that agreement did limit Quebec's ability to be the true master of its education system, because the Canada millennium scholarship foundation could stop payments if it did not agree with legitimate changes in orientation by the Government of Quebec.

Finally, in the 2008-09 budget, the Conservative government is announcing the end of the millennium scholarships and the gradual disappearance of the foundation. The program is to be replaced by a new student grant program.

● (1805)

The government claims that it will fully respect Quebec's jurisdiction—forgive me if I sound skeptical—and that it will have the right to opt out with full compensation. We will see.

The motion also suggests using as its point of departure the work done by the Voluntary Sector Initiative in 2003, which sought to improve quality of life in Canada through the twin objectives of strengthening the relationship between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector and the capacity of the voluntary sector to better serve Canadians.

More than 125 representatives of both sectors sat at joint tables that focused on the twin objectives. However, Quebec was under-represented for various reasons. In addition to the fact that negotiations to develop a policy that would accomplish the same goals as the initiative were taking place between organizations and Quebec, other elements excluded Quebec organizations, as indicated in the final evaluation report:

Quebec involvement was not aided by the perception that the VSI process was based on an “English Canadian model”: the language used in documents often did not resonate well in Quebec; many of the Quebec participants felt quite isolated; the working language was English; and the consultation processes did not make effective

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use of the provincial networks in Quebec. Moreover, at the same time negotiations with the provincial government were ongoing with the hopes of developing a policy of recognition and support for the community sector which would serve the same purpose as the accord. Many organizations in Quebec felt their time was better invested in these negotiations and hence the VSI was not able to draw in or engage key players from Quebec.

In addition, looking to interfere in one of Quebec's jurisdictions, the federal government did not even invite the Government of Quebec to this consultation, which was being held to conduct the same sort of evaluation. Instead, the federal government, in its wisdom, left Quebec out and went ahead with a more “anglo” approach to managing community organizations.

The exchange mechanisms put in place by the federal government are at risk of getting bogged down in politics. For example, take the Society for Educational Visits and Exchanges in Canada or SEVEC. SEVEC is a charitable organization focused on education that offers three different types of programs for young people: exchanges, educational trips and forums.

SEVEC's mission is to create, promote and facilitate enriching educational opportunities for youth within Canada for the development of mutual respect and understanding through programs of exploration in language, culture, and community.

So far, the principle of the program does not seem to irritate anyone too much, aside from the obvious interference in Quebec's areas of jurisdiction. But the principle of educational enrichment and mutual understanding hides the propagandist aspect of the program funded by Youth Exchanges Canada.

The template letter young people can use to thank their member of Parliament reads in part as follows:

I am writing to let you know that it was an unforgettable experience for my group, and that we are even more proud to be Canadian because of it.

Once again, behind a noble cause, we see the government's true intentions in funding national programs. Would a national voluntary service policy for youth also fall victim to the desire to spread federalist propaganda using a self-development program? Once again, the Liberals are trying to use worthy causes to interfere in Quebec's jurisdictions.

Given that the motion sets out a series of intrusions into Quebec's jurisdictions; given that Quebec already has its own 2006-2009 Youth Action Strategy, which includes enhancing young people's participation in society; and given that Quebec also has programs that promote exchanges with students around the world, the Bloc Québécois and I are opposed to the motion put forward by the member for Papineau.

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•(1810)

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity tonight to speak on this important piece of business and would like to indicate how pleased I am that it seems to be getting such an encouraging reception in the House, except perhaps from the Bloc. I am sure once it gets to committee, since it sounds like the Conservatives are going to support it with some caveats attached, we will have a very good discussion and debate. It is an important piece of public business for us to lend ourselves to at this particular point in time in our history and as we look at what is coming at us economically.

I want to first congratulate the member for Papineau for being elected to this place and also for having the good fortune to be the first one in this Parliament to bring a private member's motion before the House. It is in keeping with his past experience and work in this country that has been admired by many. It is only right that he should lend us his knowledge and experience as we try to order the business of the country in support of our young people as they become the leaders of the future.

It is a good piece of business and in keeping with the spirit with which his father gave great leadership to the country many years ago. Certainly, I was an admirer of his father's quest for a just society and his focus on social justice, things like the Canada assistance plan which is in keeping with the values of my party and caucus.

I am happy to be able to say that the New Democratic caucus in the House will be supporting this motion but with a friendly amendment which I will move at the end of my 10 minutes this evening, which the member for Papineau has already agreed to. It will hopefully be the beginning of some further debate around the timing of how this will work its way through the committee and when it will actually get done.

I heard from the member for Souris—Moose Mountain that there is some concern about the timing, but I think we can work that out. We have already had some discussion about that and, in the spirit of co-operation that seems to be prevalent in the committee at this time, we will find a way to get this done in a timely fashion. To begin that, I will be moving a friendly amendment.

We already have before the standing committee on human resources, skills and social development a bill that I have been working on for the past two Parliaments to study poverty. Particularly at this time in our economic history, it is important to bring forward to the House something that could be considered and might be helpful in that sense. That is why I have some concern about the timing, but I think we can work that out and I will be tabling an amendment.

For us to be focusing some time both in the House and in committee on this issue of youth and volunteerism is very helpful. It is a very positive and constructive thing to be doing. I know there are groups out there trying to do what they can with some very limited resources and it is time that we at the senior level of government look at it and respond to their experiences and requests for more support.

I was sharing with the member for Papineau that just the other night I had dinner with the Katimavik group in my own city of Sault Ste. Marie. There were young people from across the country sharing culture, language, experience and learning from each other and the communities in which they are now engaged in volunteer activities. It was very positive and it impressed me. As a matter of fact, it was not the first time that I have had dinner with that group. In my memory, as a federal member it is the third year that I have done that.

I also remember growing up in northern Ontario, living in Wawa and working with the ministry of natural resources in parks, in the junior ranger program at that time. We used to bring literally hundreds of young people from the big cities into the wilderness to provide them with the experience of working in that wonderful part of our province and country, an experience that I am sure many of them never forgot and took with them. I am sure some of them actually went on to study natural resources and everything attached to it. It lent to them becoming professionals and volunteers in their own right by looking after our environment.

•(1815)

I also looked at some research that has been done going back to 2004, the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating. There is some wisdom in that, remembering and noting the amount of time that youth in volunteering give to working in communities and building communities. Youth, age 15 to 19, tend to volunteer with different types of organizations than other volunteers, for example, education, research and social services organizations.

They engage in different types of volunteer activities, for example, coaching, refereeing, officiating or fundraising. Their motivations also differ from others. They are more likely to volunteer to improve their job opportunities, to explore their own strengths, and because their friends volunteer as well.

There is some potential, and I think the member has spoken about this, to use the Internet for this program and this may become part of the study as well.

This same study of 2004 speaks of the Internet playing an important role of volunteering of any individuals. About 20% of volunteers said that they used the Internet in some way during their volunteer activities, while about 8% said they used the Internet to seek volunteer opportunities. That I am sure will be far greater for our volunteer program serving youth because they are so adept with that.

Obviously, in giving our support we hope we can agree that participation in any volunteer program for youth will reflect the racial, regional, economic and gender diversity of Canada. We, at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, are currently engaged in examining the federal role for a national poverty reduction strategy. I see how this idea of volunteer service may also fit within a poverty plan. It might be a good recipe in this time of recession. It could mobilize an entire generation of people, who may find themselves out of work and with little to do, to participate to make their communities better and to learn new skills.

It can give young people the experience to appreciate the value of community service and capacity building; that there is more to life than making more and more money or consuming or buying things. Volunteer programs, like what is imagined here, can do the extraordinary work of twinning our seniors and young people in projects where we honour the seniors' wisdom, skills, and put these two generations together to learn from each other and grow our communities even more.

It is an opportunity, for example, for possible incentives for volunteers. In Australia, for example, as part of its 2020 summit there is a program where youth and student volunteers put in hours of community service to help the elderly and the homeless, and clean up environmental problems. In return they get some assistance and discounts on their student debt.

We see in the United States now some fledgling initiatives under President Obama where he is beginning to talk about volunteer neighbourhood and community organizations that will be the underpinning of what he sees as the new hope and new change that will come to that country and will be necessary in that country.

I want also, before I move my amendment, to give credit to the member from my own caucus, the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, who soon after he came here in 2004, being one of the youngest members of the House, took on an initiative to go across the country to speak to young people and their organizations to see what we could do as the federal government to assist and to help them grow and be even more effective.

I believe, in listening to the question he asked of the member for Papineau, that he spoke to the member for Papineau in his role as the head of Katimavik at that particular point in time. I think it is important that we give credit where it is due.

I know that the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour will probably speak later and he will have some important things to offer to this discussion as well.

At this time I would like to put my friendly amendment. I move:

That motion M-299 be amended by substituting the words “November 16, 2009” for “October 2009”.

• (1820)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to inform hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 93(3), no amendment may be proposed to a private member's motion or to the motion for second reading of a private member's bill unless the sponsor of the item indicates his or her consent.

Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Papineau if he consents to this amendment being moved.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I do.

The Deputy Speaker: The amendment is in order. It reads:

That motion M-299 be amended by substituting the words “October 2009” for “November 16, 2009”.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, the amendment should substitute “November 16, 2009” for “October 2009”. I want it to read “November 16, 2009”, not “October 2009” so could that be reflected in the record?

The Deputy Speaker: I will read again what I have on my page.

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...substituting the words “October 2009” for “November 16, 2009”.

That was the wording of the amendment as delivered to me from the hon. member.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, could I get a ruling from the Table officers as to what that means to them?

I want to substitute “November 16, 2009” for “October 2009”. Is that possible?

The Deputy Speaker: The wording as it currently appears is that the date is October 2009. It is the Chair's understanding that if the amendment is accepted, the new wording will read “November 16, 2009” instead of “October 2009”. Is that the intent of the amendment?

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the hon. member for helping to ensure clarity on that.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have a chance to speak to the motion. I want to pay tribute to my colleague from Papineau who is new to the House but not new to many Canadians. The motion is entirely in keeping with the work that he has led in Canada, being very involved in Katimavik, and as a leader of young Canadians.

I also want to associate myself with the generous comments from the member for Sault Ste. Marie about the member's father, which is entirely in keeping with the way he does his business here. Pierre Trudeau was a great leader in Canada. One of his great friends was Jacques Hébert. Jacques Hébert was the person who really formed Katimavik and battled for its survival when it was in peril. He was very involved as well in Canada World Youth. These are very noble people who have done a great service to Canada. This motion is in keeping with the work they have done.

I want to congratulate my colleague for the motion. It is one that I am proud to second and support enthusiastically.

The member for Papineau is well known in Canada for his support of young people and their engagement in our country. He understands the incredible benefit to our communities and our country when young people participate and are engaged.

This is the overarching purpose of the motion, to begin the debate about young people and their role in making Canada stronger.

We often hear, as politicians in the public discourse, that young people are not engaged, that they are too busy or perhaps do not care. That is not my experience at all. I would argue that there is a wealth of interest in our young people to understand their communities, their country and the world.

As a member of Parliament, it has been one of my highest priorities to meet young people. I visit schools whenever I can, elementary, junior high and senior high. One of the things I hear most often is this interest in providing service to the country, both for their benefit and, more particular, for the benefit of the country and the world.

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I have had the chance to hold youth forums within my responsibilities as critic for human resources, meeting students involved with universities and colleges. The young people I meet, almost without exception, care deeply about their communities, the world around them and understand the importance of solving some of the pressing issues of our time better, in a lot of cases, than the adults around them.

My sister has been very involved with Canada World Youth and Katimavik, but she spent many years for Canada World Youth, another great program that takes kids from Canada and pairs them up with kids from other countries, usually developing countries, to do projects. It is a great building experience for young Canadians. She is now working with WUSC, which is another great organization that does work internationally. She is in Sri Lanka, a country that is torn by all kinds of troubles right now, and doing wonderful work there as well.

I have had the opportunity as a member of Parliament to travel, as most of us have, and I have had the chance to see places where Canada can make a difference. I remember a trip to Kenya with my colleagues from Scarborough—Guildwood, Halifax and Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, where we saw among the poorest people in the world, but we saw Canadians working there, helping out, providing service both to that community, to the world and to themselves.

If people do not think we can make a difference through private members' business and private members' motions, I refer them to my colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood who produced Bill C-293, the overseas development act, in the last Parliament and steered it through all the challenges and got it adopted.

We can make a difference here through motions like the one the member for Papineau has proposed and the one the member for Scarborough—Guildwood had adopted in the House and proclaimed last year.

There is great work to be done and my colleague, the member for Papineau, spoke about some of the domestic work.

We can do more in the world, as well, and the overseas part of this is really important. I am a little too young to recall exactly, but I read a lot about the Peace Corps of John F. Kennedy in the 1960s, the AmeriCorps of Bill Clinton in the 1990s, the Gap year in the U.K. and in other European countries. It is so important that young people have a chance. They want to be involved. They want to have that opportunity. They want to know how they can help serve their country and serve the larger community.

The response from students is very important, and it is more than most of us would hope for. There is a sense of optimism and a sense that we can make the world better, and the motion before the House, which I encourage everybody to support, will go a long way in helping them to do that.

•(1825)

The Deputy Speaker: I regret having to stop the hon. member. He will have five minutes left in his allotted time the next time the bill comes before the House.

It being 6:30 p.m., the time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

•(1830)

[*English*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on January 28, I rose in the House to address the fact that the government continues to flagrantly attack women's rights. In the budget bill it has done so once again by attempting to bargain away pay equity rights. I might add that it is an unnecessary measure in a budget implementation bill. Pay equity is a fundamental human right and distinct from other issues in collective bargaining.

The government's approach is simply wrong. It contends that it has presented before us a proactive piece of legislation, but it misses the mark. By eliminating CHRC recourse, it makes the proposal less palatable. Pay equity will simply be grouped with other issues at the bargaining table. As Tom Flanagan clearly said in a *Globe and Mail* article yesterday, the Conservatives clearly do not value equal pay for equal work.

The Conservatives' proposed changes for pay equity in the public service do three things. They restrict pay equity by limiting the number of "female-predominant groups that can claim pay equity". They redefine the criteria of whether women's work is of equal value by introducing the market forces factor. They relegate pay equity to the bargaining table. Essentially, pay equity will now be negotiated along with all other issues during a collective bargaining process. The employer would not have to do a pay equity assessment or to share relevant information with the union. The employer will not have to remedy any pay equity gaps. As I said, this removes pay equity from the human rights framework. Workers in the public service would no longer be able to launch a human rights complaint and unions could be fined if they assist or encourage members to file a complaint through the Public Service Labour Relations Board.

This is shameful. These are steps backward and undermine women's rights. This is not a proactive piece of pay equity legislation.

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Women are among the most vulnerable in society and they do not deserve to be attacked like this. The previous Liberal government, under the ministers of labour and justice, had committed to actual proactive pay equity legislation. We were moving forward. We were taking real action. There was real progress. However, in a bid to make a political gain, the NDP members sold themselves out to the Conservatives, jeopardizing so much progress, sacrificing child care, the Kelowna accord and pay equity, which is often forgotten on the altar of political expediency. Today we pay the price for it.

Once in government, the Liberal Party would not only restore what we have lost, we would improve women's rights and specifically pay equity rights. As members on this side of the House, we can stand up to say that we strongly believe in pay equity, that is, equal pay for work of equal value. The present bill does not respect the constitutional equality rights of women. It does not respect our international obligations and commitments made by CEDAW and others. As the President of the United States said, this bill and the government is on the wrong side of the future as it relates to women.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the current government, the women's program will now work to bring about the advancement of all women in Canada, not just certain target groups.

The government is determined to achieve no less than the full participation of women, on a level playing field, in all aspects of Canadian society. We invite the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre and all members of this House to work with us in order to reach this goal. I am quite certain the President of the Treasury Board, who is responsible for pay equity, will agree that when women succeed, we all succeed.

I think it is important to emphasize that Status of Women Canada and the women's program are receiving more funding than ever before in the history of Canada. This is thanks to the leadership and vision of our Prime Minister. I am sure the hon. member is aware that the increase of 42% in funding for the women's program constitutes a considerable increase.

The most recent budget is a long-term economic action plan that will benefit the entire Canadian population, including women, and I can assure the hon. member that many Canadian women have told us that this plan addresses many of their concerns.

It offers a balanced approach to stimulate economic growth, to rebuild confidence and to support Canadians, including women and their families.

The Minister of State (Status of Women) consulted women across the country. I can say that our government made sure that women would benefit, directly and indirectly, from all major federal investments. Furthermore, personal income tax cuts, social housing initiatives, and measures to protect the most vulnerable members of society will definitely benefit women and their families.

As for pay equity, the irony in all this, and the problem with the Liberals, is that, for 13 years, they never proposed any solutions for pay equity. They even ignored the recommendations of a task force

created by their government on the matter, and they never lifted a finger to do anything about this situation.

We have only been in power for three years and we will continue to keep our promises. Canadian women deserve our attention, which is why our government is bringing forward proactive legislation. Finally we will have pay equity. Let us work together for a better future for all Canadian women, and we will all come out ahead.

● (1835)

[*English*]

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, I want nothing more than to work together for a better future for Canadian women but we clearly have a different understanding of what equality means and what equality rights mean, which is a major impediment in working together.

I want to remind the member opposite that the former Liberal government did commit to bring in the pay equity legislation. Mr. Fontana, the minister of labour at the time, made a commitment to bring in draft legislation that would be brought forward with all of the appropriate stakeholders.

The dilemma we are facing right now is in supporting this budget. We understand that women are among the most vulnerable in Canada and, during this economic crisis, they are the most likely to suffer first and foremost on the economic hardships. We know they need this stimulus package but we also know they need pay equity and they need a government that will work for real pay equity, which is equal pay for work of equal value. Our promise, as a Liberal government, to the women of Canada is that as soon as we are in—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, at the instigation of the Prime Minister, the government has developed an economic action plan. Since 2006, the government has enhanced Status of Women Canada and its mission, which is to promote equality for all Canadian women in society and their full participation in the economic, social and democratic life of our country.

We have made enormous strides. For 13 years, the Liberals did nothing about pay equity for women. We, however, are keeping our promises. All women in Canada and Quebec have the right to be equal to men, and we will work toward that.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a man whose story touched thousands of Quebecers died on Saturday in l'Enfant-Jésus hospital in Quebec City. He had become the symbol of the battle for recognition of the connection between the presence of TCE in the water in Shannon and the development of multiple cancers in residents of that small municipality.

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I am raising this matter this evening in order to talk about a scandal. The Shannon scandal concerns water contaminated with TCE. It was known as long ago as 1978 that toxic wastes were going into a pond dug in the sand, that is now dubbed the blue lagoon. That lagoon contaminated the water table. Those toxic wastes have been present in Shannon since 1944. National Defence and the Department of the Environment are both involved in this scandal.

A report on Radio-Canada's program *Enquête* told us what happened in the small town of Shannon. Everyone was transfixed by this story as well as by the turmoil and worry caused to the citizens of Shannon because their groundwater was contaminated by solvents containing TCE. For 30 years, the citizens of Shannon have been fighting the complete indifference of governments to solving this problem. We will soon be told that they were given \$13.3 million to make their water safe. Wells were located in the mountains and \$13.3 million was needed.

If not for the Radio-Canada program, which caught the attention of all Quebeckers, this government would never have taken action. I asked questions in this House and was told that it could not be discussed because the case was before the courts. The only way for the citizens of Shannon to defend themselves was to create a citizens' committee and to go to court, even though the citizens' committee had asked this government to settle the matter by providing compensation and, most important, by decontaminating the soil that is completely saturated with TCE.

The response was to hide. The minister responsible for the Quebec City area hid behind the argument that the matter was before the courts. It is no longer before the courts, but there is an appeal. This government must take action. It must compensate the citizens of Shannon and assume responsibility for contaminating Shannon's water. We can see that once again they want to let the citizens go to court.

We know the energy that takes and the stress the citizens of Shannon must contend with. We know that brain, kidney and liver cancer is proliferating in Shannon. We would like to know the exact link between the contaminated water and the incidence of the cancers. In the United States, 1 in 25,000 are affected by the brain cancer that caused young Alexandre's death; in Shannon there are 8 cases in fewer than 5,000 citizens.

• (1840)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government, the Conservative government, is shouldering its responsibilities to Quebeckers. The health and safety of the people of Shannon, of Quebec and of all of Canada is vitally important to our government.

I would like to clarify some things. We have corrected the problem. We have worked hard to defend the interests of the people of Shannon, and we have put forward a viable solution. What is more, the Mayor of Shannon has publicly recognized the fine job we have done and thanked us for solving this problem. If he is satisfied, why isn't the Bloc Québécois member?

Today, the people of Shannon are benefiting from our government's efforts and the attention the Conservatives are giving Quebec. If the Bloc's goal is to protect Quebec's interests, then how can it question this measure? Does that mean the BQ has a hidden agenda?

That it defends Quebeckers' interests only when it is convenient? That is a wonderful party philosophy.

The Bloc freely chose to vote against our economic action plan, a plan that would make it possible to build a new water system in Shannon. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs is working very closely with both the municipality of Shannon and the stakeholders in order to find an effective solution for completing this project. On February 13, the minister reaffirmed the Conservative government's promise to provide real, concrete results for the people of Shannon when she announced \$13,345,000 from the federal treasury to get this crucial project started. We are working tirelessly with the Government of Quebec to speed up the distribution of those funds so that they can be handed over to the municipality as quickly as possible.

Why did the Bloc vote against this budget? Why did the Bloc also vote against this project? Is the Bloc opposed to infrastructure projects in Quebec? Does it believe that updating our infrastructure is a bad thing?

As usual, the Bloc Québécois is playing politics, instead of working with us to help Quebeckers and Canadians.

And why did the Bloc Québécois vote against the economic action plan, which is full of measures that would allow us to help not only the people of Shannon, but all Canadians and all Quebeckers?

• (1845)

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, what the member just said is an insult to the people of Shannon and the citizens' committee. Such statements are pathetic. The people of Shannon want the ground decontaminated and they want compensation for the effects of the tainted water. The departments of National Defence and the Environment are jointly responsible for the contamination.

Suggesting that the \$13.3 million should solve Shannon's problem is ridiculous. The only thing that has been solved is that the people of Shannon will have access to safe drinking water. As I said before, that is only because of the Radio-Canada broadcast that covered the situation and the distress it caused the residents.

Those who have heard the broadcast will agree that the government's arguments are pathetic. They are playing politics with this tragic situation.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the Bloc Québécois that the mayor of Shannon publicly acknowledged that we have done a fine job. He thanked us for solving the problem. If he is satisfied, then why is the Bloc Québécois not?

The government made a decision and found the funds for Shannon. The members opposite should be congratulating us, supporting us and voting in favour of the budget.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 9, 10 days before the visit by President Obama, I asked the federal government to repatriate Omar Khadr, because he is a child soldier. Since then, the government's position has not changed. Today, I would like to take the few minutes I have to try to make the minister and his representative understand that Omar Khadr does have the status of a child soldier. When he was 15, he was accused of a crime. That is exactly what the convention covers. A child soldier is someone who committed acts when he did not have full command of his own will and actions. He is someone who has been brainwashed and made to believe certain things. And today, we are saying that Canada signed the international convention and must honour that agreement, repatriate Mr. Khadr, treat him appropriately and, above all, not turn him loose just like that. Mr. Khadr's lawyers had offered to have him supervised and monitored, a little like young offenders who need to be reintegrated into society. They want to make sure he is rehabilitated, and that is the approach they were leaning toward.

How can the government decide not to keep the promise it has made to the international community? It signed the convention on child soldiers. This is a case of a child soldier. Canada is putting itself in a very bad position with regard to international public opinion. It wants a seat on the UN Security Council, yet the first thing it does is go back on its word in an obvious case.

President Obama has decided to close Guantanamo. The Minister of Foreign Affairs had the perfect opportunity yesterday to tell the American Secretary of State that we are prepared to repatriate Mr. Khadr, that this would free them of the last prisoner from a western country, that we would take him in, put him through the appropriate legal proceedings, as needed, and ensure follow up. Why did Canada not chose to take this approach, one that reflects the values of Canadians and Quebecers, and is more in line with the practices it has followed in the past in matters of foreign affairs? Why did it not decide to give this individual a chance, instead of hiding behind the fact that he faces serious charges? We know that when the alleged act occurred, he was a child soldier. Amnesty International, the three opposition parties and the Canadian Bar Association all want Canada to ask that Mr. Khadr be repatriated.

How can Canada maintain this attitude, which, in my opinion, shows nothing more than a certain servitude to the Bush period in the United States? We are no longer in that period. Can the government not show the least bit of humanity and ask that Mr. Khadr be repatriated, thereby assuring full protection of his rights as a Canadian citizen?

• (1850)

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we are well aware, in 2002, Omar Khadr was arrested by the U.S. forces in the context of his alleged involvement in the armed conflict in Afghanistan, following his alleged recruitment and use as a combatant by al-Qaeda.

Although there have been recent developments in the United States regarding Guantanamo Bay, Mr. Khadr continues to face

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serious charges pursuant to American decisions. As such, it is up to the U.S. authorities to make a determination regarding the administration of justice in the United States as related to individuals within their jurisdiction.

As Mr. Khadr was and remains in the U.S. control, it is up to the United States to make a determination regarding the disposition of his case.

The government is clearly aware that President Obama has issued executive orders related to Guantanamo Bay detainees. These orders are reflective of the fact that the U.S. administration is actively engaged in examining issues related to Guantanamo Bay and the cases of the individuals currently in detention.

The issuance of orders is indicative of the importance being given the possible ways forward in addressing related issues. It is, therefore, imperative that this process be allowed to run its course and that Canada not speculate on hypothetical scenarios.

We are closely monitoring all developments in Mr. Khadr's case and stand ready to receive information from the United States when a review of his file has been completed. Until such time as this has been done, it is simply premature and speculative to address requests for Mr. Khadr's repatriation.

It is important to be clear on the facts of the relevant executive order. It does not mean that Mr. Khadr is no longer subject to the U.S. criminal justice system. Although proceedings against Mr. Khadr before the military commission are presently halted, given the prosecution's request for adjournment for 120 days was granted by the military judge on January 21, a review must now be undertaken. This will determine how the United States authorities will review the case of each and every Guantanamo Bay detainee, including Mr. Khadr. We are not in a position to predict the outcome of this review.

The Canadian government was instrumental in ensuring that Mr. Khadr would not be subject to the death penalty. Indeed, charges were referred against him on a non-capital basis. Further, Mr. Khadr's case has been raised on several occasions at the ministerial level with U.S. authorities. As recently as yesterday, as the member has alluded, the Minister of Foreign Affairs had discussions with the U.S. secretary of state when he was in Washington.

Regular, ongoing welfare visits have been carried out by Canadian officials in Guantanamo Bay. Just because the military commission process has been halted does not mean that welfare visits will be halted.

The Canadian government is acting responsibly and prudently in allowing the United States to make decisions regarding the way forward vis-à-vis Guantanamo Bay detainees. The Government of Canada awaits the outcome of this process with interest, including decisions specifically affecting the disposition of Mr. Khadr's case.

Adjournment Proceedings

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, the question is very simple. Does Canada, the federal government, the Conservative government, believe that Mr. Khadr was a child soldier or not? If he was, the government is duty bound to ask for his return to Canada. If he was not a child soldier, that is another matter. Given that he fits the profile, Canada is currently not fulfilling its responsibilities, especially since we know Mr. Khadr was tortured.

Again yesterday, President Obama stated that the United States no longer carries out torture. It was banned when he became President. The Conservative Party should be interested in noting that there has been a change in practice in the United States. They want a right-leaning state but without punitive practices such as those that do not allow deserving individuals to be rehabilitated and to avail themselves of the appropriate legal process.

The Conservative government will have to face the serious consequences engendered by its attitude: it is not fulfilling its international commitments and has allowed a child soldier to be kept in prison for much longer than warranted. In addition, it is an illegal prison. The President of the United States has decided to close it.

I hope that the Conservative government will finally understand its responsibilities and take appropriate action. That is what all Canadians want.

● (1855)

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, the mechanism that will be put in place to try detainees is a matter for the U.S. authorities. As I have stated and as the member has stated, President Obama wants to close Guantanamo Bay and he has given an executive order. I fail to understand why the member cannot wait to see what that executive order will do and wait for the review of that case by the American authorities.

Whether Mr. Khadr is found guilty or not guilty, we must remember that Mr. Khadr faces the serious charge of murdering an American medic.

We need to wait and see how this process works. On the one hand, that party says it agrees with Mr. Obama but, on the other hand, it does not want to wait for the mechanism that he has put in place.

We need to wait to see the mechanism, the decision and the disposition of Mr. Khadr's case. As such, the Government of Canada will act at that time.

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

(The House adjourned at 6:56 p.m.)

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