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Monday, April 27, 2009

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 27, 2009

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1100)

[*English*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should work co-operatively with the governments of the territories and of the seven provinces which constitute the Provincial North, and with Aboriginal and local governments in these regions, to develop a strategy to improve transportation and other vital public infrastructure.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move Motion No. 298, which calls on the federal government to work with the territories and the provinces which make up the provincial north as well as local and aboriginal governments to come up with a common strategy for infrastructure in northern regions of Canada.

I am especially pleased as a member whose riding is in a geographically northern region but outside the territories which are most commonly thought of as the north to include the provincial north within the scope of this motion.

The definition of provincial north is open to different definitions. Perhaps the best and most thorough work on the concept of northernness or nordicity has been done by geographer and scholar Louis-Edmond Hamelin at Laval University.

The north that I am asking members of this House to think about today is the region of Canada which includes the three territories but also the northern portions of seven provinces, from the Stikine and Peace River regions of B.C., across the northern prairies, across the three provinces which ring Hudson's and James Bay through to Labrador.

These regions share many of the geographical challenges of the territories, such as scattered populations, areas with few or no roads, and reliance on air transportation or seasonal modes of transport, such as ice roads or shipping in the ice-free period of the year. They share many economic similarities, especially the importance of natural resource industries from traditional hunting, fishing and trapping through to modern industrial forestry, mining and petroleum exploration and development.

There are many cultural similarities, communities which share a deep attachment to the land, an understanding of isolation and a strong sense of place. There are social and demographic similarities, including many small communities with large service centres serving outlying populations.

The territories and the provincial north, as well, have large populations of Inuit, Métis and first nations people. For this reason my motion calls for their inclusion in the development of a northern infrastructure strategy. At a time when Canada and the entire world face economic uncertainty, all governments have been looking toward infrastructure investment as a way to stimulate the economy. This is another unstated purpose behind the motion I am proposing today.

I can well appreciate that members from southern and urban ridings look to projects such as transit and urban renewal as economic stimulus in the form of infrastructure. Without taking anything away from those equally legitimate needs, it is important that Canadians in other regions, in other kinds of communities also share in infrastructure development and modernization.

My home community of Williams Harbour on an island off the coast of Labrador does not need a subway, however, we do need a new wharf to replace one that was destroyed by fire a few years ago. It is a project that is overdue and which I hope has not been held up by any jurisdictional squabbles between provincial and federal governments.

My current hometown of Happy Valley Goose Bay does not need light rail transit, but we do need a new airport terminal and improved highway connections to the rest of Labrador, the rest of the province, and to Quebec and the rest of Canada.

This motion is about co-operation and coordination and respects the jurisdictions of all governments. There is to be no intrusion by the federal government on provincial, municipal or aboriginal government powers. In fact, I am calling on the federal government to exercise its own powers, operate its own programs, and provide its own services as they relate to infrastructure but in co-operation with the provinces, the territories and local governments.

Private Members' Business

Intergovernmental co-operation on infrastructure is vitally important throughout the northern parts of Canada. In northern Quebec, I would draw to the attention of hon. members the agreement by the federal government and the government of Quebec to extend the runway at Puvirnituq in Nunavik. I would also point to the construction of the highway to Natashquan, completed in the 1990s through a Canada-Quebec accord and through the Quebec government's attempts to secure federal funding for route 389, which also connects to Labrador.

This is not a matter of intrusion on provincial jurisdiction but rather co-operation. We have seen the same need for co-operation in my own riding of Labrador. Over the years the federal government has played an important role in infrastructure development in our region.

• (1105)

The coastal airstrips were built in the 1970s and 1980s through federal contributions. Without that involvement by the federal government, Labrador's coastal communities would likely still depend on float planes and ice runways with long interruptions in service between freeze-up and break-up.

Federal funding was instrumental in the construction of roll on/roll off wharves which modernized marine transportation in coastal Labrador. Federal funding has been critical for the development of our highway transportation system.

Whether it was the construction of the Labrador Straits highway more than 30 years ago or the construction of the Trans-Labrador Highway, it has been the federal government which has in fact paid the largest share of highway construction in Labrador.

In fact, at times it has been the provincial government which has failed to put its fair share back into Labrador. I would hope that that era is over and that Labrador can expect a return on its contribution to the public purse. All levels must step up to the plate. There can be no laggards.

At the same time, with so many infrastructure projects competing for funding, political priority and public attention, it is more important than ever that governments work together instead of a cross purposes or ignoring the need all together.

I appreciate the recent federal contribution toward the Trans-Labrador Highway which continues the work that was truly made possible by the 1997 Labrador transportation initiative; an injection of over \$340 million in federal funding which allowed the Trans-Labrador Highway to reach the state of completion it has today.

By the end of this year it should be possible for the first time in our history to drive an unbroken highway from Labrador City to L'Anse au Clair. This will be a historic moment for Labrador and one that is only possible because the federal and provincial governments worked together.

I hope that federal-provincial disputes will not preclude further work in our region, including much needed upgrades such as resurfacing, and the widening and paving of the full Trans-Labrador Highway, phases I, II and III, and new road connections.

The Nunatsiavut government, which represents Labrador Inuit, has also expressed an interest in studying the possibility of tying northern Labrador into the highway system. I would hope that the provincial and federal governments would work with Nunatsiavut on this study. This is a perfect example of the type of federal, provincial or territorial and aboriginal government cooperation which I have in mind in proposing this motion.

This kind of cooperation is also a vital means of exercising Canadian power and jurisdiction in our Arctic and sub-Arctic regions.

There is something to be said for the exercise of military, police, coast guard and other shows of hard power or force by way of proving Canadian jurisdiction in the north. I remind the government that Goose Bay which has commanded the northeastern air routes from Canada and North America since the 1940s still seeks a renewed role in Canada's military and security interests in the north.

The defence minister made specific promises and we have not forgotten. However, while recognizing our security interests, I would question the assumptions behind the Prime Minister's repeated assertions that when it comes to the north Canada has to use it or lose it.

In fact, aboriginal Canadians, Inuit, Inuvialuit, first nations and Métis, have been using the Arctic and the north for countless generations. It is narrow-minded and somewhat ethnocentric to suggest that we risk losing the north because we have not been using it.

The real political risk in our northern regions is not so much that other countries could threaten us with military force or incursions into our jurisdiction. The real risk comes from political alienation, when northerners, from the territories and the often forgotten provincial north, fail to feel included. The real risk is a rise of cleavages or divisions when northern people are neglected even as their lands and resources are highly prized. Northern people in the territories and the provinces, aboriginal and all others who call northern Canada home have to be brought more fully into the Canadian family.

That happens when our governments work together to improve the basics: the roads, airports and harbours that link the northern and southern economies. It includes the vital infrastructure of modern life, such as water treatment, sewage disposal and energy and communications infrastructure.

• (1110)

Those are the kinds of developments which will constitute Canada using the north and those are the kinds of projects, especially now that infrastructure is such a hot topic and economic stimulus such an important goal, that northerners need. The north and south alike will benefit when all orders of government work together to improve the basic public infrastructure in the Arctic and sub-arctic regions of our country.

Private Members' Business

That means improved access to markets for northern goods and improved access to northern resources for the economy in the south. It means increased access to southern services by people in the north and easier access to the north by tourists and other visitors. It means improving living standards for aboriginal and all northern residents. It means improved health care, more doctors, more nurses and vital social infrastructure.

It means the preservation of our culture, our way of life and sharing with one another. When it comes to sharing, it means building, not diminishing institutions like the CBC. It means environmental protection and proper regulatory regimes. It means respect for aboriginal people.

This motion calls for a vision. It says that we do not only pay attention to the north at election time or for one-off announcements, or for the north to feel valued only when someone somewhere else wants something for their own purposes.

The motion calls on government to work with us to make Canada more complete, more whole. The strength of a nation lies in its people. When the people feel stronger, the nation is stronger. The motion is about home for myself and hundreds of thousands of other northern Canadians who know in our hearts and minds that true, integral, sincere efforts will yield positive outcomes.

A strategy and implementation of that strategy is what the motion calls for. It is about honouring our commitment to the north and it is needed now as much as any time in our history.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for the motion he has put forward. It is a motion that in many respects is a good one. It speaks to a number of areas where, of course, there has to be a national policy, but there is a significant difference between the northern territories and the northern parts of the provinces. Any strategy that diminishes the efforts and the importance of the federal effort to the northern territories in terms of governance, in terms of the responsibilities that actually lie within Parliament and can be expressed through Parliament, will have difficulty.

Does the hon. member not see the importance to the northern territories of having policy that can drive those territories toward their goals of responsible government?

• (1115)

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, there is no presumption within the motion, or any diminishment of our three territories. It does call for their full inclusion. It does call for the voice of those in our three territories to be honoured and to be respected. It also says though that there are similarities between other northern regions. We cannot divide people based only on a certain boundary. If a person lives in a community 50 kilometres north, in the Northwest Territories, or in a community a little farther south, the same aspirations would be shared along with the same challenges.

I do not really believe that we can have a fully comprehensive strategy if we do not include all northern people. We can give something to each other. We can strengthen each other. There is no presumption nor diminishment of the Northwest Territories, Yukon or Nunavut in the motion. In fact, it raises them up.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague made an excellent speech with respect to his motion. I would like to ask the member a question about something which I think disturbs us all.

In Nunavut the level of substance abuse is extremely high. The level of involvement of first nations people and the Government of Nunavut is actually very low, despite the fact that governments of Canada have put in large amounts of money into Nunavut.

My hon. colleague has a lot of experience and knowledge in this regard. What solutions could the member offer to deal with the horrible social challenges that affect many communities in the north? How would he restructure the relationship between Nunavut specifically and the Government of Canada to enable the people of Nunavut to reap the rewards of the vast swath of resources that exist in that area? How could we improve the relationship between the territories, Nunavut, Nunavik and the Government of Canada for the people of the north?

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, when there are challenges, we always want to find solutions, but the solutions must come from the people themselves. They know themselves, their land, their communities and what they have to go through better than we will ever know the issue or study it or understand it. The solutions must come from the people themselves. In terms of solutions, I leave it to them, but I also invite all colleagues to come forward with suggestions.

When we talk about relationships, the issue of devolution in Nunavut, as it is in the other territories, is an important process that must continue and be accelerated.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to highlight some of the important work that is already under way across northern Canada. This work is stimulating local economies, creating jobs and improving our vital infrastructure.

Before I begin, however, I want to commend my colleague, the member for Labrador, for bringing attention and focus to this important issue. This government agrees that it is vital to invest in infrastructure nationwide, particularly in the north. This will improve the quality of life for both aboriginal and non-aboriginal residents and will attract important economic development to the region.

As someone who represents a riding in southern Manitoba, I am also an individual who has lived in a northern community in Manitoba. I appreciate the challenges and benefits of living in a northern community and I thank my hon. colleague very much for bringing this motion forward.

A key element of this government's northern strategy is to develop the necessary infrastructure to encourage economic growth and create employment opportunities for northerners. We have been developing on this commitment in a number of ways.

Private Members' Business

Our government has put in place the tools for the final commercial decision on the largest northern infrastructure project now in development, the Mackenzie gas project. The proposed 1,220 kilometre natural gas pipeline system along the Mackenzie Valley of Canada's Northwest Territories will connect northern on-shore gas fields with North American markets.

This enormous private sector project will create employment and benefits for northerners and is central to realizing the full economic and social potential of Canada's north. Consistent with its role as owner of the resource, the Government of Canada is prepared to engage in the project with respect to the financial framework.

Much of the infrastructure development in the north is private sector driven. Therefore, the establishment of a national P3 office to assist Canadians in pursuing an innovative P3 project and accessing the \$1.26 billion national fund for private-public partnerships will also help northerners.

More recently, budget 2009, Canada's economic action plan, announced a total of \$1.4 billion in new investments to address the priorities of aboriginal people. This funding includes \$515 million to address priority on-reserve infrastructure needs. Of these funds, \$200 million will go to the construction of 10 new schools on reserves, as well as three major school renovation projects.

A further \$165 million is earmarked for drinking water and waste water infrastructure projects. Another \$150 million over the next two years will be used for construction and the renovation of first nations critical community service infrastructure. I am talking about things like health clinics, nurses' residences and policing infrastructure, which are very important for both aboriginal and non-aboriginal people living in the north.

All of these investments will stimulate economic and community development across northern Canada. As much as they will spur economic activity, they are equally important because of the positive impact these expenditures have on the health and safety and quality of life of residents living in these communities.

In addition, our economic action plan sets aside \$400 million to address the pressing need for housing on reserves. Construction and renovation work will bring immediate and long-term benefits for first nations families and children. As well, our action plan includes significant investments in social housing off reserve. For example, there is \$200 million in dedicated funding to support the renovation and construction of housing units in the territories.

I want to be clear that these are not the first or only federal infrastructure investments in northern Canada, which also includes provinces with northern concerns. Since 2006, this government has taken action on multiple fronts to accelerate infrastructure development in remote areas of the country. For instance, let me highlight some of the infrastructure development taking place through the first nations infrastructure fund.

The fund was created in October 2007 to meet infrastructure needs both on reserve and with non-first nations partners, such as neighbouring municipalities. The joint initiative of this fund pools \$131 million over five years to support infrastructure development in first nations communities. The fund can be used for projects in eligible categories, such as solid waste management, roads and

bridges, and energy systems. All of these investments serve to improve the quality of life for local residents while simultaneously making their communities more attractive places to live and to do business.

• (1120)

The first nations infrastructure fund supports the Government of Canada's goal of providing stable and reliable funding to provinces, territories and aboriginal governments so they can plan for the longer term. To date, our government has invested \$62 million nationwide in 76 roads and bridges projects, setting the stage for greater involvement of many remote and northern communities in the economic life of this country.

Canada's economic action plan also includes regional funding for the territories. For example, there is \$50 million over five years for a new economic development agency for the north. Ultimately, this agency will coordinate all federal economic development programs and services in this region. In addition, the action plan invests \$90 million over five years for strategic investments in northern economic development, SINED. This initiative will promote sustainable economic growth in the north.

Territorial governments alongside aboriginal governments and organizations, municipal governments, colleges and chambers of commerce, to name just a few, have been key partners in the development of the past generations of SINED investment plans. They have also been heavily involved in the implementation of many of these projects, either as proponents or co-funders. A new set of investment plans is being negotiated right now.

Much has been done to improve northern regulatory regimes, one of the best ways to promote the northern environment and generate enduring economic and social development in this region. This government is already making significant progress in improving transportation and other vital public infrastructure in Canada's north, and clearly, we can continue to make a measurable difference in the lives of northern Canadians by moving along this productive path.

Our government will continue to work co-operatively with the governments of the territories and of the seven provinces that have northern regions. We will also continue to work closely with aboriginal and local governments in these regions to advance our shared objective of creating a more vibrant economy and producing a better quality of life for northern Canadians.

Working together, I am confident that we can continue to improve transportation and other vital public infrastructure in the north, and support the development of long-term infrastructure required in each province and territory to achieve this goal. I for one am wholly committed to this.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as we have known for some time, communities in northern Quebec, like those in the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut, are in desperate need of infrastructure.

When it comes to poorly adapted, inadequate transportation infrastructure, to the housing shortage that is at the root of serious social problems, or to any kind of infrastructure that is essential to the well-being and development of any community, but is typically minimal or even non-existent, it is clear that one federal government after another has neglected the north.

There is a high cost to such neglect, not only in terms of dollars, but also, and more importantly, in terms of heavy social costs. This problem cannot be solved overnight. Updating and developing northern infrastructure will require the kind of significant, stable and predictable financial support that is seriously lacking right now.

These vital investments must be tailored to meet the needs of people living in the north. They must also be integrated with money promised by the provinces and the Government of Quebec.

The motion before us today calls on the government to develop “a strategy to improve transportation and other vital public infrastructure” in cooperation with Quebec and the provinces, as well as with “local governments”.

While it is a good idea to consult with the target populations despite having ignored them for so long, such consultations have to follow the rules.

And the rules are simple: in Quebec, the Government of Quebec is the interlocutor for local Nunavik governments.

The Government of Quebec is in the best position to assess the needs of its people and to connect them to the right funding programs. The Government of Quebec is also in the best position to consult target aboriginal communities and economic, institutional and social stakeholders, and to get them involved in the decision-making process.

In far too many cases, the federal government has interfered with the cooperative relationship between Quebec and the communities involved, a relationship that is critical to harmonious and stable development.

Every federal government, whether Liberal or Conservative, has always adopted a brand of federalism that some have called predatory. Moreover, they have ignored Quebec's jurisdiction and have interfered in areas that are none of their business, such as education, health and municipal affairs. That interference does not help anyone, because all it does is make a mess of programs.

The last federal budget clearly shows the unscrupulous character of the federal government when it come to intervening directly with the municipalities. It is allocating \$2 billion to provide loans directly to the municipalities, going over the heads of the governments of Quebec and the provinces, even though they are the ones who will ultimately be responsible for whatever is built.

Private Members' Business

In the past, as we have seen, certain federal infrastructure programs have allowed some of the larger municipalities to build themselves two or three new arenas, for example. Unfortunately, those three arenas are no longer profitable at this time, and we have a good example of that in Quebec.

In short, if the federal government goes ahead with the development of an infrastructure strategy for the north, it must cooperate with Quebec and the provinces, and not deal with the municipalities directly, since they do not fall under federal jurisdiction.

Yet nowhere in the motion before us do we find any indication that the federal government has understood that there are limitations on its actions. On the contrary, the text of the motion implies and even suggests that the federal government could develop this infrastructure strategy in cooperation with local governments, that is, with the municipalities, even though neither the municipalities nor the infrastructure fall under federal jurisdiction.

I would remind the House that municipal and strategic infrastructure in Quebec is in urgent need of major investments—and this is also true of Nunavik, in the north—given their ageing and deteriorating state. In addition to that, I would even say that there is a lack of infrastructure in the north.

The money allocated to repairing and developing infrastructure by the Quebec government and the municipalities is insufficient. On its own, the Quebec government is not in a position to increase its contribution enough to make up for the deficit. There is such a deficit in terms of infrastructure, and the deterioration of infrastructure is so serious, that even greater investments are needed at this time in order to be able to solve the problem.

After years of modest contributions, the federal government has finally decided to invest gradually in infrastructure renewal through various programs and funds, including the gas tax transfer and the building Canada program.

• (1130)

Even though substantial funding is now available, needs are still great.

In addition to the amount of money allocated for infrastructure, there is another aspect of infrastructure funding that is problematic: the great number of programs now in place is threatening Quebec's ability to keep full control over choosing projects and how they are carried out. These new programs, which are all more or less targeted, are making previous agreements that recognized Quebec's authority obsolete and are requiring new one-off agreements where Quebec is having to work hard to assert its rights.

The same is true of funding for public-private partnerships, which receive federal funding based on merit. It is not up to the federal government to decide what infrastructure will be built in a public-private partnership; it is up to Quebec, which has the expertise to make such decisions.

Private Members' Business

The Bloc Québécois position on this is clear and firm: Quebec has full jurisdiction over municipal affairs under the Constitution, as well as over regional economic development. It has the authority to determine which priority projects will be most beneficial to Quebecers, including the residents of the north, through organizations such as the Société de financement des infrastructures locales du Québec.

Currently, every federal infrastructure program targets a different clientele and has its own schedule and criteria. This is creating confusion and allowing Ottawa to set its own priorities even though the Government of Quebec and local governments have exclusive authority to do so.

It is interesting to note that in its 2007-08 budget plan, the Government of Quebec was very clear on this issue. The document states:

Moreover, to accelerate investment and make the administrative process less cumbersome, money for infrastructure should be paid to the provinces through block funding rather than through a number of administrative agreements covering specific projects.

The Bloc Québécois has consistently called on the federal government to change funding conditions so that infrastructure investments reflect ability to pay. Our proposal would have the federal government paying 50% of costs, the Government of Quebec and the provinces, 35%, and the municipalities, 15%, which would accurately reflect the ability to pay of each level of government.

The federal government collects more tax than it needs for its own responsibilities.

With the money it received from such overtaxation, it started spending in a large number of areas outside its jurisdiction: health, education, social programs, family policies, natural resources, culture and university research. Over the years, the federal government has created certain needs. At one time, it withdrew from these areas and the provincial governments were forced to look after needs that were no longer met by the federal government.

Ottawa acknowledges that the Constitution prevents it from legislating in these areas, but it claims that it can spend money in any area it wants to, without regard for the distribution of powers. That is its so-called spending power.

In the areas that Ottawa is wading into without being invited, Quebec is supposed to have complete sovereignty in the choice of programs and autonomy in funding.

In particular, this is the case for infrastructure, which—with a few exceptions such as interprovincial railways, bridges spanning the seaway and border infrastructure—are within the jurisdiction of the governments of Quebec and the provinces.

Unfortunately, and as I was just mentioning, the federal government has a longstanding tradition, which it is continuing, of interfering in provincial jurisdictions by providing funding. The motion should have been clearer. The motion should have been very clear in this regard and stated that the federal government should work cooperatively with the governments of the provinces and the Government of Quebec, but not with local communities, to resolve the infrastructure problem in the North.

•(1135)

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Labrador for bringing forward this item under his private member's time.

I am pleased to hear any discussion in the House of Commons on northern issues. I look on his amendment with favour. The amendment speaks to a number of ongoing issues in terms of northern development, transportation within the north and our connections to southern Canada. All these things are extremely important.

As someone who has worked on road issues in the Northwest Territories for many years and our connections to Alberta and British Columbia, I know the difficulty we have right now.

Last summer a section of our major connection to British Columbia through Fort Nelson was closed for a month because the roadbed has completely deteriorated. This roadbed is hundreds of kilometres long and the cost of putting it in good shape is far beyond the capacity of the territorial government right now. It needs the support of the federal government. British Columbia is interested but we need to have the federal government at the table as well talking about the issues, agreeing that these are priority items and putting some dollars toward them. When we talk about shovel-ready, that is one road that could be fixed immediately.

The same situation exists with the Dempster Highway located between Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Since it was built, that roadbed has completely deteriorated. The patchwork that has been going on to keep this road link open has caused ongoing costs. It is difficult to get ahead on a road development of that magnitude because it would suck up the entire road building budget of the Government of the Northwest Territories.

We have one fairly decent highway into the Northwest Territories from Alberta. The other road link that we have looked at for years goes through Fort McMurray. I note that my colleague from Fort McMurray—Athabasca has failed to meet with me on this particular road issue for the three years I have been here. We would like to see the federal government come to the table on this issue as well.

The requirement for road improvements can be stretched right across the country, through northern Manitoba where there is a lot of interest in the linkages into Rankin and into Kitikmeot. This issue spans the entire north.

We have no leadership from the federal government on roads and have not had any for many years. Without some indication from the federal government that it wants to support northern roads and the connections to the provinces, and without the federal government actively lobbying the provinces and ensuring that they come to the table as partners in building and maintaining these roads, we will be in the same situation in the future.

Private Members' Business

Energy is another issue. For a long time the federal government invested in a bureaucracy that talked about remote communities. Natural Resources Canada did a lot of work identifying all the remote communities in Canada and their particular energy requirements. Any communities off the transmission grid or off the natural gas pipelines were considered remote communities. They are located in the northern part of provinces, the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut. We need a policy from the federal government that would deal with the need to change the energy systems in these remote communities. The work was done years ago but we do not see any funds being directed toward accomplishing the kind of work that we all know is necessary.

My riding has had great success in the last two to three years with the Government of the Northwest Territories converting major buildings from fuel oil to wood pellets. This helps the forest industry in northern Alberta, which I am sure my colleagues from Alberta would agree is a good idea.

• (1140)

Where is the federal government in this? Where is the federal government in encouraging the transformation of northern communities from this rather expensive fuel oil, which is not good for the environment, into a reasonable product like wood pellets? Was it in the budget this time? No. We do not have leadership on energy issues throughout the north, neither north nor south of the territorial boundaries, in communities like Fort Chipewyan, Alberta and Churchill, Manitoba.

The third issue I want to touch briefly on is the northern residence tax deduction. We need tax policy. Tax policy in Canada applies south of the 60th parallel to the northern parts of the provinces and north of the 60th parallel to the three territories. The Conservative government acknowledged that there was a problem with it in the budget in 2008 by raising it by 10%. Everyone across the north wanted it raised by 50% just to keep up with the inflation that had incurred in the 20 years since it was first introduced by the Mulroney government. Taxation policies for northerners are important for the territories as well as the northern parts of the provinces.

Yes, there are requirements for the federal government to work co-operatively to build the required relationships in the northern part of our country. I would encourage the government to support this motion as well and to become proactive on the issue.

When we talk about the water issues, I speak to the Mackenzie Valley basin. For the last 12 years, after the federal government and the three provinces and two territories signed the Mackenzie Valley agreement on water, we have yet to see the federal government stand up and demand that the bilateral agreements be signed so some work can be done on water issues across western Canada. That has not happened. Once again, we see the lack of work within the federal government, co-operatively with the provinces, to make conditions better for northerners.

I have some concerns with the direction of the motion. I do not want the motion to interfere in any way with the movement of the three territories toward governance. The three territories and the federal government have a fiduciary relationship, which is still there and intact. It has not been changed. One thing about northern parts of the provinces is that they have the full protection of their provincial

governments for resources and land. That does not exist in Nunavut. It is being slowly introduced in Yukon, but we need movement in that aspect.

When it comes to regulatory issues, the government has said that it does not like the way regulations work in the north. It wants to change them. Our government in the Northwest Territories has presented the federal government with the kinds of changes it sees would be required in the regulatory system. I would like to see what the federal government will do with the pragmatic and straightforward recommendations from the government of the Northwest Territories. Is the government interested in northern development of people and governance, or is it simply interested in opening up the north for further economic development?

• (1145)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I, too, compliment the member for Labrador for this important motion, which brings attention to the north and outlines its difference.

I will take a different tack than the last speaker. I will not criticize the government because it has come out in favour of the motion, supporting the north and understanding its differences. It is a motherhood statement to say that the north needs more infrastructure and transportation. It is pretty obvious. It would be astounding if any member of Parliament were to vote against the north.

That is why I was a little surprised by the statements of Bloc members. I assume they will come around. I do not think they want to write off the north. In fact, they have said that they understand the costs are higher in the north. They said on occasion that the federal government had gone over and above the province in an uncoordinated fashion. The motion would solve the problem they identified. It talks about co-operation. The mover said that there was no impingement on jurisdiction and that everyone needed to work together and make their contributions to this.

The northern part of Canada includes three territories, Nunavik, in northern Quebec, Labrador and the northern part of seven provinces.

There are 308 members of Parliament, but almost 40% of the country is represented by three members. In the northern half of provinces in the north there may be only a dozen members out of 308. The member for Labrador has raised a wonderful opportunity for the north to be represented. It is also wonderful that all parties, with the exception of the Bloc, which I hope will change its mind, support the motion.

Why are members of Parliament supporting this? What special strategy is required? I think most members of Parliament know, but for the public, I will go over some of the items.

Private Members' Business

First, the north has a very harsh climate, which impinges on infrastructure and transportation. There is constantly shifting permafrost. It buckles sewer pipes. It makes potholes in the road. Construction is made more difficult when the temperatures are -40°. There is a very short building season. There are all kinds of problems because of the climate. Because of climate change, this has actually been exacerbated. Solutions came forward for building on permafrost, for instance, having foundations with open houses underneath the screening so the land would stay frozen. Now it is melting. Administration buildings and roads are collapsing, which I will talk about a bit later. There are even more challenges in the north today.

Another difference is there are very few taxpayers. There are 100,00 taxpayers in three territories. My riding has 1,000 taxpayers. The base is not enough to pay for the necessary infrastructure. Because of the long distances in that jurisdiction, very few taxpayers are served by this infrastructure. We could have a 10 kilometre road in Toronto servicing a million people, who pay \$10 of their taxes for infrastructure. We could have a similar 10 kilometre road in the north servicing 10 people. Each of them are not going to pay \$100,000 in taxes. It is not realistic. We need this goodwill and support from other members of the House.

In some areas the problem is not the difficulty of repairing these expensive roads, because there are no roads. Things we have come to accept in southern Canada, such as people going everywhere by road because the infrastructure is there, is, in a large part, not available in the north. There would be huge development costs to make these roads available.

I want to talk about aboriginal people for a moment. A large percentage of aboriginal live in the north. Traditionally they have had even less infrastructure provided to them than people living in other parts of the north. Because there are higher proportions, it exacerbates the deficit of public and transportation infrastructure even more. Aboriginal communities have the same problems as other communities, such as climate change, harsh climate, permafrost and the long distances. However, on top of that, they have less revenues. In fact, infrastructure is normally a result of grants by provinces to municipalities. The first nations quite often do not get that same size of grant, or any grant at all, on occasion.

• (1150)

The second big source for municipal infrastructure is from property taxes paid by owners, but in aboriginal communities they have a different social structure, a different organizational method for their society. There are no property owners in many of their communities. They have a collective society. They do not have that source of revenue either, so we have this huge deficit.

Another item people have to remember, and which the member for Labrador so wisely put in the motion, is to involve aboriginal people in the meetings to come up with the solutions. Mandated in the constitution is a government to government relationship. It is pretty obvious that they have to be at the table. They have expressed some concerns to me about how they will access directly the present infrastructure funds in the programming, as a government to government relation, and not going through other governments to get funds that are rightfully theirs.

In the modern treaties of land claims and self-governments, these nations have in some cases more powers than the provinces of Quebec, Ontario, or other provinces, so they need to be at the table in discussions for items under their jurisdictions.

We all know there are four orders of government in Canada. When I go into schools, sometimes it is disappointing that quite often students only guess three. They get the municipal order of government and the federal and provincial orders of government, but they forget there is also now a constitutionally-created first nations order of government.

The vice-president of FCM spoke in Yukon this weekend. He said that there was still an infrastructure deficit in Canada, even after the stimulus package gets delivered. If there is a deficit for the entire country, imagine what it is for the north, with the harsh problems and challenges that I mentioned. Imagine even more what it is like for the aboriginal communities in the north.

Transportation is very important. As I said, there are very few roads in the north, especially in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Labrador and other parts of the northern provinces. A lot of supplies in Nunavut, Nunavut and NWT have to be shipped or flown in. With products costing five times as much, people cannot afford to live there or to have a reasonable life like the rest of Canadians.

The Liberals have always thought that what expresses our sovereignty is a happy, fulfilled, well-nourished, housed and educated people who are proud of their culture. However, if people cannot afford to live there, they will not follow the use it or lose it strategy of the government. We need to deal with the transportation problem. Improving shipping and lowering the cost of getting supplies in would be one way to do that.

This would require investment in ice warning, in charting the waters in the north, putting movable buoys in and building ports. There are no ports in most of those northern communities for ships to dock and deliver supplies, so people do not have to pay five times as much for a quart of milk.

I will quickly mention some projects in my riding for which we would like to get some support. Mining and tourism are big in the north. We have the Mayo B project and the North Carol Road and Freegold Road projects. We need more hydro. We need to eventually join the B.C. grid. We also have the road to Tuktoyaktuk, the Shakwak project, communications projects and broadband. CBC should not close its CBC a.m. tower in Whitehorse, as it was thinking of doing. Paul Martin's northern strategy, which everyone has followed, gave great attention to the north.

I am sure everyone would want to support this motion and support northerners and their needs.

• (1155)

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has worked and will continue to work closely with provinces and territories on helping meet the transportation and other public infrastructure needs of all our communities, including those in the north.

We are committed to working productively with all our counterparts in all provinces, territories and municipalities across Canada. We understand that it is important to have a positive working relationship with our counterparts and we are committed to maintaining that.

We have continued this relationship through the development of the building Canada plan. We consulted with all levels of government about how this could help address their infrastructure concerns, and the result was the \$33 billion building Canada plan.

We understand that no single level of government is sufficient to address the diverse infrastructure needs of this country. That is why we are committed to working with all levels of government in order to develop infrastructure that will meet the needs of all Canadians.

Our infrastructure programs, like the building Canada plan, are all about multi-level partnerships and co-operation. We continue to work very closely with the provincial and territorial governments to ensure that essential infrastructure needs are being addressed and that any critical gaps are readily identified and dealt with. This collaboration is essential not only to fulfill long-term and short-term infrastructure goals and build world-class infrastructure, but to stimulate our economy and improve the quality of life of Canadians.

We have clearly demonstrated our commitment to support provincial, territorial and municipal infrastructure. While we are sensitive to the federal government's role in this, we also know that when it comes to infrastructure needs and priorities, one size does not fit all. Every region of this country is different, and some require special attention.

Northern communities face unique and challenging infrastructure issues that require unique solutions to address the harsh northern climate and the large geographical area. The harsh climate and short construction season not only affect the delivery of goods and services but increase the cost of construction and reduce the lifespan of the infrastructure.

Through various investments such as the building Canada plan, this government has ensured the necessary flexibility to support its northern partners. For example, under building Canada, funding flows to the three territories through the provincial-territorial base fund, which will see over \$182 million flow to each of the territories. This is about 10 times what they would have received under a per capita allocation. Canada's economic action plan accelerates these remaining payments to provinces and territories to be made over the next two years. This provides predictable funding to help provinces and territories meet their infrastructure needs.

Through this program, this government has ensured that the investment we have made in the north can be expanded to include infrastructure considerations unique to northern needs. We understand that living in the north poses some challenges different from the remainder of the country, such as higher construction costs.

Private Members' Business

Because of this, our government has ensured that it will provide more funding to its projects by covering up to 75% of the costs, as opposed to the traditional 50%.

The three territories will also receive, combined, \$88.5 million under the gas tax fund to support their infrastructure. This is money directly to the bank accounts of the municipalities.

In recognition of their unique needs and smaller populations, the territories are allocated a set amount of gas tax funding, instead of the per capita gas tax funding formula operating in the provinces. In addition to funds under building Canada, municipalities will receive hundreds of millions of dollars per year from the Government of Canada through the GST rebate.

Last year, a record \$1 billion in gas tax funding was sent out to Canadian municipalities. Recently we announced that the gas tax fund will double to a record-breaking \$2 billion. The first payments have been moved up from June 1 to April 1, in order for more projects to get under way this year. This \$2 billion annual investment will continue as a permanent measure to supplement municipalities with an additional significant and predictable source of infrastructure funding.

• (1200)

Our commitment to northern infrastructure is further emphasized by the government's continued co-operation in the Yukon to pursue the development of the Shakwak project and improve sections of the Alaska Highway in the territory. As 85% of Yukon's population lives in communities along the highway, this project also contributes to the economic and social well-being of the Yukon.

Since Canada's economic action plan, the government has continued to meet with provincial, territorial and municipal governments to discuss infrastructure priorities and identify shovel-ready projects. We have taken action to assist our partners to cope with the current economic downturn. We have implemented measures to stimulate the economy, create jobs, and support Canadian families.

Over the past few months, we have taken serious action by approving nearly 500 projects in small communities across the country, worth over \$1.5 billion in combined funding. By expanding and accelerating our infrastructure investment, we will provide almost \$12 billion additional stimulus for our economy, above and beyond our \$33 billion building Canada plan—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I must interrupt the member at this time. She will have four minutes when debate resumes on this matter.

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.

Business of Supply

I wish to inform the House that there is a bill missing from today's order paper. On page 7, there should appear a government bill in the name of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians. That bill may be introduced today. A corrigendum to that effect is available at this time. I regret any inconvenience this may have caused hon. members.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: On a point of order, concerning the bill missing from the order paper, could you tell us what bill it is, please?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The bill has been placed on notice. It has not yet been assigned a number. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians will introduce a bill entitled An Act to amend the Cree-Naskapi (of Quebec) Act.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADA-UNITED STATES BORDER

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government has failed to take all necessary steps to ensure that the US Administration and the US Congress fully understand the critical importance of our shared border to trade and economic security in both Canada and the United States; and must ensure that the Canada-U.S. border remains an efficient gateway through which our national security, personal, and commercial interests are properly promoted and defended.

He said: Mr. Speaker, for most Canadians, when we think of the Canada-U.S. border, we think about our travel back and forth and the times we may have visited, often spontaneously.

Certainly I, as a child, when visiting my grandparents in Windsor, would often cross the Detroit border on a whim with my parents to go shopping, or sometimes we would go to Buffalo. I certainly have many constituents who will travel across the border to catch a Buffalo Bills game. It is that sort of spontaneous relationship that most people think about.

Really, we do not often stop to consider the power of our relationship and exactly what it means to both of our economies. In a time when the economy is softening, particularly here in North America but across the world, it is something important to reflect upon.

We know the United States and Canada are each other's largest trading partners, but I think it is important to reflect upon the fact that 39 of the 50 U.S. states list Canada as their number one trading partner, that 86% of Canada's exports go to the United States, yet conversely only 23% of U.S. exports go to Canada. In fact, for my home province of Ontario, that number is even larger, with 92% of Ontario exports going south to the U.S. border.

We know that 44% of the U.S. population lives within a day's drive of southern Ontario, that bilateral trade between our two countries totals \$570 billion Canadian, \$435 billion U.S., and that some six million jobs are directly supported by bilateral trade in both Canada and the U.S. We know Canada is the United States' largest supplier of energy. We know the Detroit-Windsor border crossing is

the busiest of any border crossing in the world. We know that 300,000 travellers cross the Canada-U.S. border every day; that is some 35,000 trucks each and every day. It is a massive relationship.

I mentioned before that relationship, which so many jobs are dependent upon, particularly in southern Ontario but right across Canada. We are seeing that come under threat. Part of that threat certainly is the downturn in the economy. We know that from February 2008 until February 2009 we have seen a 20% decrease in bilateral trade between our two countries. That has had a huge impact.

No small amount of impact is being felt by the inaction of the Conservative government and its refusal to stand up on a number of key issues. I am going to start, if I can, with the western hemisphere travel initiative.

I think it is important to note that less than 30% of U.S. citizens hold a valid passport, yet the restriction that will come in this June will mean that U.S. citizens have to have a passport in order to cross our border. If we go back to the example I gave early, on regarding Canadians going south, it works with Americans coming north.

I talked about the number of people, 130 million U.S. citizens living within a day's drive of southern Ontario. A lot of them are coming to places like the Niagara region, to spend their dollars for tourism. These are not trips they plan for a long time but trips they undertake perhaps on a whim, maybe at the end of a week, saying "Let's go to a winery," or "Let's go catch a festival at Stratford," or "Let's go to Toronto to watch a ball game". That kind of spontaneous travel accounts for a huge amount of trade.

With this passport restriction, there is going to be a major impediment. People who are considering spontaneous travel, instead of going to the Niagara region, as an example, are going to say, because they now require a passport, "Well, let's just stay at home or consider a U.S. option".

Yet the options were pretty clear for the government. One clear option was the Olympics. We have the Olympics, which are going to be coming to Vancouver, and the eyes of the world are going to be focused on Vancouver and that region. One would have expected that the government would be making the argument to U.S. legislators to push off, at the very least, the implementation of this passport requirement until after the Olympics.

In fact, when I was in Washington and had the opportunity to talk with many different governors and many different congressmen and senators, a lot of them were surprised that this point had never been raised with them, that the idea of pushing it until after the Olympics was something that had not been raised by Canadian officials.

To me, that is shocking. Here is an example where we can say to the United States, "Do we want the focus of the world to be the gridlock and mayhem that will happen at the Canada-U.S. border crossing near Vancouver?"

Business of Supply

•(1205)

Instead we should be trying to ensure that for all those U.S. citizens who want to come and enjoy the Olympics, to cheer on their team, they should have the opportunity to cross that border without the sudden shock of realizing they are going to be turned away because they do not have a passport.

Another point which is important to consider is that many U.S. legislators have been coming up with ideas that they themselves are surprised the government has not echoed. Congresswoman Louise Slaughter raised a couple of important ideas when I met with her. One was the idea of a day pass or a casual travel pass that would allow someone access to the country for a couple of days with some additional requirements. That has not been pursued, yet when we talk about the importance of that spontaneous travel back and forth, it is surprising it is not something that has been echoed here, that we have not reached out to her and tried to work with U.S. officials to bring that initiative forward.

In some cases the provinces have been the leaders in trying to find solutions while the federal government refuses to take action. In British Columbia, Premier Campbell has worked very closely with Governor Gregoire of Washington on developing an enhanced driver's licence. They recognized that because the federal government was refusing to take action to try to push that June date, they had to try to find an alternative solution. They worked on enhanced driver's licences. There are some privacy concerns which have to be sorted out, but at least they are taking the initiative. Why that initiative was not grabbed nationally I do not know, but certainly it has been grabbed by Premier Charest in the province of Quebec and by Premier McGuinty in the province of Ontario. They are working with their northern counterparts in the United States to actively find solutions to make sure that the June implementation will not have a devastating impact on our bilateral trade.

The area that is the biggest concern to me is the lack of the government's response to the erroneous facts we have seen emanating out of the United States for a long time. I will go over some of them, and most specifically, because it is the most recent example and because it is by homeland security Secretary Napolitano, I am going to quote from an interview she had on April 20 with CBC correspondent Neil Macdonald. Then I will talk about the government's response.

Secretary Napolitano said:

...we're no longer going to have this fiction that there's no longer a border between Canada and the United States...

I know that the pattern at the Canadian border has been informality. But borders are important for immigration purposes. They're also important for crime purposes... terrorism.

She went on to say in an address to a Washington audience:

[O]ne of the things that I think we need to be sensitive to is the very real feeling among the southern border states and on Mexico, that if things are being done on the Mexican border, they should be done on the Canadian border.

She was speaking to the issue that the Canadian border and the Mexican border should be treated with equivalence. Secretary Napolitano has repeated this again and again. It is something that is deeply concerning when we see the Americans move obviously to very extreme measures in dealing with Mexico. The idea there is any

kind of equivalency would have a devastating non-tariff barrier impact on trade and obviously on travel. She said one thing of most concern in an interview and I will quote the entire passage because I think it is relevant. It starts with the reporter asking:

You know 6,000 civilians were killed in drug violence in Mexico last year. They export kidnappings. I think we can all agree that's not happening in Saskatchewan. Why the need for the same level of security on the Canadian border as the Mexican border given two drastically different realities?

Secretary Napolitano responded:

Look, the comment you read of course was taken out of context. The law doesn't differentiate. The law says the borders are the borders and these kinds of things that have to be done at the borders.

Secondly, yes, Canada is not Mexico, it doesn't have a drug war going on... Nonetheless, to the extent that terrorists have come into our country or suspected or known terrorists have entered the country across a border, it's been across the Canadian border. There are real issues there.

That is a pretty remarkable statement. The reporter continued her questioning:

Are you talking about the 9/11 perpetrators?

Secretary Napolitano:

Not just those but others as well. So again, every country is entitled to have a border. It's part of sovereignty.

•(1210)

What is remarkable about this is that she does not just allude to the myth that 9/11 terrorists came across the border from Canada, which in fact is a complete falsehood, but she also talks about the extent to which terrorists enter into the U.S. by crossing the border from Canada.

The government's response on this was to say, "I don't believe there is an effort to change the level of security at the Canadian border". That came from the public safety minister.

In fact when I questioned the minister in the House, the minister said that the secretary corrected herself. He is right. She corrected herself on one fact, in that the 9/11 terrorists did not come from Canada. Yet on all the other statements she remains steadfast. In fact, even after her statement about 9/11 in which she was extremely clear that she thought at that moment in time that the 9/11 terrorists came from Canada, she did not yield any of the other facts she quoted. In fact, even after issuing a statement correcting the 9/11 terrorist myth, she said, "There are other instances, however, when suspected terrorists have attempted to enter our country from Canada into the United States". She also said, "Some of these are well known to the public, such as the millennium bomber, while others are not, due to security reasons".

The millennium bomber incident was 10 years ago. That person was apprehended at the border successfully and charges were pursued. The person was dealt with and did not get across the border. The only example the Americans can point to is a decade old, an example frankly where Canada succeeded in getting the individual who was responsible.

Business of Supply

This myth is continuing to be repeated. As late as last Friday, Senator John McCain came to Napolitano's defence by saying, "Some of the 9/11 hijackers did come from Canada, as you know". Senator McCain who was the leader of the Republican Party is coming to Secretary Napolitano's defence by saying that her original statement was in fact accurate. In fact when I was in Washington and spoke with legislators, this myth was repeated to me several times by different congressman who said that they would like to have a more open border with Canada but they have to be careful because the 9/11 terrorists came from Canada.

This myth continues to stand out there and yet the government's response is to ignore it and to say the Americans made a correction and we do not need to worry about it, that we can move on. The government refuses to confront it.

In 2004 the 9/11 commission reported that all the 9/11 terrorists arrived in the United States from outside North America. They flew into U.S. airports and entered the U.S. with documents issued by the United States government. Of course, no 9/11 terrorists came from Canada. Yet Napolitano's predecessor, homeland secretary Michael Chertoff, said last year that more than a dozen suspected extremists had been caught trying to enter the U.S. via Canada. There is no evidence. Senator Hillary Clinton said, "There needs to be tighter security at the Canada-U.S. border because of the perceived 9/11 fall down".

We see again and again this myth being repeated. In the United States, even the government's own ambassador has said, "It frequently comes from members of Congress. These are people who should know the difference but forget it sometimes. It is frustrating to us because we have to address it every time the matter comes up". The ambassador has to address it because in the House of Commons we have a Minister of Public Safety who does not think there is a problem, who thinks that that correction fixes everything and that we do not need to worry about going on an offensive.

The government's silence on this issue costs us dearly because these myths pervade. Our silence and our inability to stand up and speak for our country, to defend our interests and to explain clearly that Canada has obviously taken clear action to make sure that our border is every bit as safe as the American border, that a terrorist is just as likely to fly into Cleveland to attack Boston as to fly into Toronto, that our security interests are collective, that our failure to repeat that refrain at every opportunity, to launch an all-out PR offensive is costing us dearly. It is allowing the creation of thicker and thicker borders which greatly jeopardize our trading relationship.

The other issue I want to talk about briefly, aside from all of those wrong facts and the government's inability to correct them, is the government's lack of interest in dealing with the incredible amount of profiling that is going on at the border and to deal with those individuals who are facing huge concerns.

•(1215)

To this day, former member of Parliament Omar Alghabra is not allowed to cross the border without being fingerprinted and photographed because he has a dual citizenship with Syria. Not so long ago, a large group of Tamil constituents were detained for some nine hours at the border. We are hearing again and again from all kinds of Canadians who are trying to cross the border that profiling

is costing them dearly. Many simply are making the decision that the trip is not worth it. The government's inaction on that is deeply disturbing.

The government's real action on the border has been twofold. First, as has been broadly reported, it has made cuts to the Canada Border Services Agency. Second, it took action to arm border guards, as if that would be the solution to our trading problem. It is going to cost us around \$1 billion. It is going to take 10 years. It is against the advice of the RCMP. Yet, the government continues to plow forward with arming border guards as if that somehow is going to solve all of these problems.

Of course, that is not going to solve the problem. What is going to solve the problem is doing what the government has failed to do. In their close relationship with the Republicans, the Conservatives failed to create a relationship with the Democrats when they came to power. They failed to aggressively work with the Obama administration to ensure that we move forward on some of the great initiatives we had under successive Liberal governments, whether it was the smart border initiatives or others, to expand that relationship, move it forward and see an opening of our borders.

When I talk to companies like General Motors, and we all know the problems General Motors is going through, one of the biggest problems is just in time delivery, the ability to get goods and services across the border as quickly as possible. When companies encounter these delays and see a thickening of the border, it means the viability of their operations in Canada is threatened. All of the jobs that are so dependent upon that relationship are put into peril.

Clearly, the government needs to be working much more closely with the Obama administration. It needs to be speaking with a strong voice for Canadian interests and standing up to misinformation rather than standing in the House and saying that the United States has made a minor correction and that we should not worry about it. The government needs to take these things seriously. Certainly, it needs to be diverting resources away from the wasteful billion dollar exercise of arming border guards that will not enhance security one bit and instead utilize that money to make our border more effective. The government needs to make sure that we secure the North American perimeter and make it as safe as possible.

With all of the money that has been poured into the Canada-U.S. border by the United States to try to thicken things up, one has to look at what that has led to. If one looks at the budget of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency, the CBP, over the last five years it has almost doubled to \$11 billion. Since September 11, 2001 it has more than quadrupled the number of border patrol agents along the northern border as well as tripled the customs inspectors to more than 5,000.

Business of Supply

However, the Hearst group looked through public records provided by Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse as a public U.S. interest group. Its analysis found that of all national security and terrorism charges filed in the federal court districts along the northern border since 2001, only three were based on referrals by the CBP. That is just referrals. All of that money spent chasing after trying to enhance and thicken the border to make it tougher to get across has led to three referrals.

Whether or not we look at the softwood lumber deal, the auto crisis, the country of origin labelling legislation, the international trafficking in arms regulation, or to our border, the government is failing. It is failing to stand up for Canadian interests. It is failing to make sure that goods and services flow freely across our border. It is costing jobs. It is time the government got the job done.

• (1220)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with some interest to the comments by my colleague across the way. I look forward to the discussion here today in the House on this issue.

Canada runs a trade deficit with every country in the world with the exception of our closest neighbour, the United States. Except for the powerful economy of the United States, we have a trade surplus. Our trade with the United States amounts to \$380 billion, or over \$1 billion a day. Canada is fortunate to have a consumer like the United States with its huge economy.

My question to the member is not designed to pit one side against the other. The Canada-U.S. border is one of the longest undefended borders in the world. There has been a considerable amount of discussion about a common continental security system. Would the member share with the House his opinion on a continental security system that would alleviate a lot of the concerns that the Americans have in regard to trade and people entering from countries all around the world?

• (1225)

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the hon. member's statements speak to the reason why he and his government need to care about the statements of Homeland Secretary Napolitano. They speak to the reason why we need to change the record on these items, address them clearly, and make sure the United States understands that the falsehoods that are being spread are causing enormous damage. The politics of fear that is being used for divisive ends is causing enormous damage to Canada and to the United States.

Second, I would remind the member of the fact that while we have this great relationship, it is under peril right now. We have seen a 20% decline in just one year of that great trading relationship that the member talked about. We cannot take it for granted. We cannot ignore statements that are coming out of the United States.

With respect to continental security, the bigger issue here is a lack of understanding. Our government lacks a strong relationship with the United States, so it is not able to explain the strength of our current system, whether it is our immigration system or our ability to defend our border. This is something that we really need to focus on, so we do not need to give up our sovereignty to protect our border.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member on having moved this motion, which is of vital importance to our relationship with the United States.

Last week, I mentioned that the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, said that the terrorists involved in the September 11, 2001, attacks entered the United States through Canada. The Conservatives have a lot to say about cross-border measures, but then they turn around and cut border services. They say that they want to make our borders safer, but at the same time, they are cutting certain services.

Would the member care to comment on that?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, borders are being thickened. The amount of money going to the Canada Border Services Agency is being cut in large part because the government is putting so much money into failed programs like the arming of border guards, which, as I said, is going to cost about \$1 billion.

I have asked the Minister of Public Safety on successive days in question period why he refuses to even acknowledge that there is a problem. If he refuses to acknowledge the problem, how can he possibly fix it? If the only response of the public safety minister is to say that the secretary has corrected herself, leave it at that, and let those statements stand, then how are we ever going to get at the root of this problem?

It seems this myth, to use the words of former ambassador Frank McKenna, "has gone viral". It is taking hold as a fact everywhere. The longer we say she made a correction so therefore we do not need to say anything, and just sit back and let this thing play out, the more damage it is going to do. We have to understand that this is not some arbitrary notion. This has a real impact and meaning for people's jobs and for our economy.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I first want to congratulate the member for his resolution. I agree with him that it is very frustrating to deal with the Americans on these issues. They are referring to the case of Ahmed Ressam, which is now 10 years old. They in fact caught him when he tried to bring explosives across the B.C. border. I believe his intention was to try to blow up the airport in Los Angeles.

I have been dealing with this issue through the Midwestern Legislative Conference for a few years. We have to keep vigilant and keep pushing the point that in fact the answer is not to thicken the border. Certainly, legislators in the midwestern United States know that there are wide open expanses of area where people like Ahmed Ressam could cross the border. We cannot possibly be policing every square inch of the border.

Business of Supply

I want to deal with the issue of the passport office. The B.C. and Manitoba provincial governments are bringing in enhanced driver's licences when in fact the passport office under the present government should have been doing something for the last couple of years to get ready for the problem we are going to have in July.

In Manitoba very few people are actually taking up the government on enhanced driver's licences because—

• (1230)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Ajax—Pickering.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for what was leading into an excellent question. I know where he was headed and it is an incredibly important point.

It is not as though this jumped on us, as if the western hemisphere travel initiative was new news and we had no time to respond or to try to seek a different path. The reality is that this has been out there for a very long time. Because there was a complete lack of federal leadership in finding a solution, it was left to the provinces to try to piece together whatever solution they could.

As much as the enhanced driver's licence is a good initiative, it is very hard to make it work. We are hearing from Governor Gregoire who very much wants to see that work but understands that Washington, where there will be so much traffic to the Olympics, is going to face huge problems.

As I asked before, why will the government not publicly state and demand that this be pushed until after the Olympics, as a bare minimum, so we do not face that nightmare, which would give us a little more time to implement solutions so that we do not have a massive impact of the casual trading relationship we have?

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was in Washington this time last week and heard the secretary give those rather offensive comments. Four of us were in the audience when she spoke. It was deeply disturbing.

It is deeply disturbing to hear it at the congressional or senatorial level. It is even more disturbing to hear it from the most important official in the administration with respect to Canada, far more important than Secretary Clinton, far more important, frankly, than the U.S. ambassador. This is the key person making these outrageous and ill-informed comments. One would have hoped that it would be better under this administration.

I want to contrast the response of the government. The minister said he shared a chuckle with Napolitano as opposed to the Liberal leader who went to Washington last week and specifically rebuked the comments of the secretary. I wonder if the hon. member would be prepared to comment on that.

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has done exactly the right thing, something, frankly, we would expect of the government, which is to go there, have direct conversations, call this out and say it is wrong. We cannot be afraid to stand up for our country. We cannot be afraid to challenge notions like this because when they pervade, they cause enormous damage.

When the public safety minister was before our committee, he said that he had a casual call that lasted a few minutes when we knew

there was a process that Secretary Napolitano was working on to devise the strategy for borders. Instead, we would expect the minister to be in the United States having meetings with Secretary Napolitano and U.S. officials to correct the record on this, to see that the government goes on an aggressive PR blitz to make sure the record is set straight.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate on the motion of the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering.

I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for York—Simcoe.

Canada is by far the most important security and trading partner of the United States. It is worth outlining some of the basic facts associated with this mutually beneficial border relationship. Every day, nearly \$1.1 billion worth of two-way trade crosses the world's longest, undefended border. That amounts to almost \$400 billion in trade each year.

It should also be noted that Canada represents the single, largest export market for 36 states. Nearly seven million U.S. jobs and three million Canadian jobs are directly supported by trade between Canada and the United States.

More than 300,000 people cross the border every single day for travel or business. This government is taking and has taken the necessary steps to ensure the new Obama administration and the U. S. Congress fully understand the critical importance of our shared border to the trade and economic security of both our great nations. Our government has taken considerable efforts already to ensure that this message is received south of the border. Moreover, our government will continue to champion this message over the coming months and years.

I would therefore like to use the time allotted to me to set the record straight on a number of fronts. Hon. members of the House will know that when our Prime Minister met with President Obama, he stressed the importance of trade between our two countries and emphasized that Canada is a secure partner to the United States. It is fair to suggest that we can be optimistic that there is a new tone and a new opportunity for Canada with the Obama administration.

The member opposite seems to be troubled by the fact that we have been able to nurture and develop a cooperative relationship with the Obama administration. I fail to understand why we would want to create and foster an antagonistic relationship with our friends to the south. We need to work with the new administration, to open our arms and embrace it, not criticize, chastise or ridicule it as we saw the leader of the Liberal Party do last week during the course of his visit to Washington.

Business of Supply

This partnership and friendship in itself is vital to ensure that mutually beneficial security measures do not unnecessarily impede legal trade between our two countries. That is why, following their meeting in February, the Prime Minister and President Obama instructed their senior officials to meet at an early date to develop strategies to enhance our collective security in North America, which included a review of the management of the Canada-U.S. border.

The Minister of Public Safety has subsequently met with Secretary of Homeland Security Napolitano, Attorney General Eric Holder, and the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism John Brennan. It was an opportunity for the minister to build upon an agenda of cooperation between Canada and the United States, one that advances our shared interests and ensures that measures taken at the border contribute to both our security and our mutual economic prosperity. Those meetings afforded the minister an opportunity to express that Canadian security interests extend to all of the citizens of North America. As I am sharing my time with the minister, I will allow him to describe in greater detail the nature of these meetings.

Bilateral meetings are only one way that our government has been working to engage the new administration. As well, the government is working very closely with the new U.S. administration to implement a number of joint security measures at our border. All of us know that one of the best ways to underline the importance of our border to both trade and security is to work on joint initiatives which serve to strengthen the ties between our two countries and to ensure that we are working in harmony with one another.

In this regard, our government has strongly supported the work of the cross-border crime forum. The mandate of the cross-border crime forum is to serve as a forum in which Canadian and United States law enforcement and justice officials from the federal, state, provincial, territorial and municipal governments can identify major issues and national policy priorities related to the problem of transnational crime and terrorism.

The work of the forum addresses broad law enforcement and national security issues that affect both countries, including illicit drugs, counterterrorism, identity theft, firearms trafficking, mass marketing fraud, human trafficking and organized crime.

This forum, co-chaired by the Minister of Public Safety with the Canadian Minister of Justice and the U.S. attorney general, will have enhanced partnerships with our security and law enforcement counterparts in the United States.

• (1235)

There is an increased awareness of the respective Canadian and U.S. justice and law enforcement systems. We have created legislative and policy frameworks to address operational needs.

Additionally, we have developed action plans and threat assessments to help us respond to emerging threats as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

Each annual meeting of the cross-border crime forum culminates with a ministerial forum co-chaired by the Minister of Public Safety, with the Canadian Minister of Justice and the U.S. Attorney General. A high level meeting such as this provides yet another opportunity for the top officials from both countries to keep each other abreast of

the latest developments. The next ministerial forum will take place this fall.

We can rest assured that Canada avails itself of this and other opportunities to keep the U.S. administration informed of our interests.

Currently, six working groups drive the agenda of the cross-border crime forum. To give just a few examples of this work in action, the cross-border enforcement group has developed joint threat assessments to identify the areas of highest priority to concentrate the efforts of our integrated border enforcement teams. The counterterrorism group participates in personnel exchanges to heighten co-operation between the RCMP and the FBI. The mass marketing fraud group is using intelligence from recent threat assessments to target top echelon criminal organizations to protect citizens of both Canada and the United States. Other groups are pursuing priorities related to drugs and organized crime, firearms trafficking and prosecutions.

These integrated border enforcement teams, or IBETs, that I mentioned, and their expansion, is one of the most significant advances of the cross-border crime forum. These teams, strategically located at 24 areas across the border, are comprised of both Canadian and U.S. law enforcement officers. Together, they develop and share intelligence to combat cross-border smuggling, illegal immigration and organized crime.

In 2008, for example, IBETs made more than 400 seizures of narcotics and contraband tobacco and recovered more than \$5 million in currency believed to be the proceeds of crime. What is more, they apprehended more than 1,300 illegal migrants attempting to enter the border between ports of entry.

The integrated cross-border maritime law enforcement initiative, commonly referred to as the "shiprider" initiative, is another example of enhanced border co-operation. Through this innovative policing model, specifically, trained RCMP and U.S. Coast Guard officers patrol the waterways and enforce the law on both sides of the marine border. Following the success of two pilot projects in 2008, Canada and the U.S. launched negotiations to develop a framework to formalize shiprider operations, negotiations which are very close to being completed.

Finally, I want to mention another project currently under development that underscores the level of co-operation between Canadian partners to enhance the integrity of the border.

In consultation with law enforcement partners, the RCMP and CBSA are examining a possible pilot project to enhance security at the U.S. border in Quebec. This project would complement and build on the network of IBETs and would target both unguarded border roads and marine crossings within the province of Quebec.

Business of Supply

All these initiatives represent the Government of Canada's ongoing and earnest commitment to strengthen co-operation with the United States on border management. I stress the word "ongoing" because bilateral co-operation is always a work in progress.

By contrast, the motion before this House suggests that effective border management results from a finite number of necessary steps. This, quite frankly, is short-sighted and a paint-by-numbers approach to bilateral relations.

This government recognizes that our exceptional and enviable relationship with the U.S. demands constant attention to changing circumstances and priorities. We are determined to do and to keep doing everything possible to promote greater co-operation, greater understanding, a more efficient gateway and a greater friendship between Canada and the United States on all issues affecting our shared border.

• (1240)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member is a very hard-working and capable parliamentary secretary, which is why I have a question for him.

With regard to the statement made by Madam Napolitano and not having been objected to strenuously by the government, is he satisfied that more work needs to be done or that everything is okay? Is he subscribing to the northern version of "Don't worry, it's okay"? We on this side and many people in Canada are worried that that comment, although having been withdrawn and explained, has done harm to the image of Canada internationally. What further steps does he think should be taken by the government to correct the impression, the imagine left by those remarks, if any?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague opposite because it gives me an opportunity to talk a bit about the history.

Somehow the members on the other side seem to forget that 9/11 occurred in 2001. Much of what they are now terming urban myths began back in September, October and November 2001. This party took over government in 2006. I would say to the House and to anybody watching that there seemed to be a long period of time between the late fall of 2001 and January 2006 where some of these urban myths were allowed to grow.

This government has made a great deal of effort to work with the current administration. The relationship between our Prime Minister and the United States president, and our minister and the secretary of homeland security, Ms. Napolitano, is excellent. I think the members opposite have a great deal of difficulty trying to understand how we could work that well with both the previous and the current administrations.

• (1245)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments by the hon. parliamentary secretary and regret that there was no mention of the 20 years of co-operation on endangered species and movement of hazardous waste across the two borders.

It is regrettable that all of the resources, the time and the co-operation that existed during the time that I was the head of law and enforcement for the NAFTA Environment Commission, have been set aside by these false assumptions that terrorists going into the United States come from Canada. It has set one border agency against another and we are arming both of them.

I would hope that the government would instead begin to put resources back into and to pay attention to the Commission for Environmental Cooperation which has forged co-operation among the border agencies of Canada, the United States and Mexico to prevent the actual trade that is going on, that is illegal and is large, and that is the illegal trade in endangered species and hazardous waste.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I wish the hon. member would pay attention to what is going on in this large arena that we call Canada-U.S. relations. Bilateral talks are going on every day in a variety of areas. Some of the areas, of which she speaks, I am certain other ministries are talking about with their American counterparts.

This is a relationship that is ongoing and building, and it is one that all Canadians should be proud of.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for clarifying some of the inaccuracies that were actually within the motion and within the opening speech, and for talking about a lot of the good co-operative work in relationship building that we were doing.

I would appreciate hearing a little more about the IBET and how it is a very good example of protecting national security and working co-operatively.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's keen interest in this whole area and for putting her time and effort into supporting this relationship between the two countries. The IBET is an integral part of the security of both Canada and the United States. It deals with cross-border crime and a variety of issues that are important to both of our countries. It also enhances the long term relationship we have with our American friends.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the importance of Canada-U.S. border relations, although I am a little disappointed by the motion in front of us. I cannot help but get the sense that the member for Ajax—Pickering is seeking to inflame some of those misconceptions on both sides of our border rather than generating a better understanding of our collective interests.

We, on the other hand, want to work closely with the new Obama administration. We believe that Canada has an opportunity right now to make positive progress on issues that are important to Canada, issues at the border and issues with American relations.

What is the way to achieve that progress? We believe the way to achieve that progress is through co-operation and working closely together, not through conflict and trying to get quick headlines by calling people names. People will not be hearing that from us. What they will be hearing from us is a tone of ongoing co-operation to advance Canada's interests.

Business of Supply

We want to be working together to ensure that our border remains secure while facilitating rather than hindering legitimate trade.

[Translation]

What makes our government unique is the fact that it takes action and does more than just spout rhetoric. Our government is making things happen. It believes in a constructive relationship with its largest trading partner to ensure security as well as mutual prosperity. That is what distinguishes our government from the party opposite.

Our government walks the talk and obtains tangible results. Just one week ago, we all witnessed President Obama's announcement that NAFTA would remain in place and would not be subject to new negotiations. That is an important gain for all Canadians. That is one of many examples of the results obtained by our government.

• (1250)

[English]

The motion before us today deals with the importance of taking steps to ensure that the U.S. administration and the U.S. Congress fully understand the critical importance of our shared border to trade and to the economic security of both our countries. I, therefore, will address some of the many ways that our government has done exactly that, while also ensuring that we remain a trusted security partner.

Hon. members will well remember the recent visit of President Barack Obama. What happened during that visit? The Prime Minister spoke with the new U.S. President about the importance of trade between our two countries and how interconnected our two economies are. He emphasized that threats to the U.S. were also threats to Canada.

The Prime Minister spoke with President Obama about some of the steps that our two governments can take to secure our joint economic future and about how Canada is a trusted security partner to the U.S., a partnership that is critically important to ensuring that security measures do not impede trade unnecessarily.

[Translation]

Just a few weeks after this visit, I went to Washington to meet with members of the U.S. Senate and Congress as well as the Homeland Security Secretary, Janet Napolitano, the Attorney General, Eric Holder, and the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, John Brennan. I spoke to them about the importance of working together on tightening our security and improving our trade ties and ensuring that our border remains open to business people and legitimate travellers.

I spoke to them about the importance of ensuring that Canadian and U.S. citizens have valid travel documents given the imminent entry into force, in June 2009, of the western hemisphere travel initiative, or WHTI. I insisted on the need to find the means to facilitate the legitimate movement of people and goods, while protecting Canada's and our neighbours' legitimate and crucial security interests.

Our government has already managed to obtain important exemptions and delays for phasing in WHTI.

[English]

The delays in the implementation and adaptation, delays in the effective date of the western hemisphere travel initiative, are something that the previous Liberal government was unable to achieve. In fact, that government was asleep at the switch when that initiative was launched. Believe it or not, at that time there was not a single effort by that Liberal government to influence the decisions being made by the House of Representatives and by the Senate of the United States. That is why we have had to dig out of the problem that the previous government allowed to arise.

When I met with the Obama administration officials, we also spoke about how it is in everyone's best interest to keep business flowing and to keep our borders open to the movement of goods and people. Our shared border benefits both our economies, supporting an integrated supply chain and millions of Canadian and American jobs. This is a point I stressed in many of our meetings.

What was the end result of these meetings? One end result, among many, is that Secretary Napolitano and I have agreed that the Minister of Public Safety of Canada and the homeland security secretary of the United States should meet at least twice a year exclusively, outside all the other meetings that occur such as G8 and the like, to resolve Canada-U.S. border issues.

That is a mechanism that never existed before, a mechanism for us to resolve our issues and advance our interests to ensure that we are on the radar screen, front and centre. That is a positive gain for Canada. That means we are going to have better results in the years to come, something again that the previous government was unable to deliver.

We will continue to meet and to develop measures together to give us greater security and facilitate trade. We will also work to finalize details on initiatives that allow Canada and the U.S. to work more co-operatively on border issues.

One such initiative is the integrated cross-border maritime law enforcement initiative, commonly referred to as the shiprider initiative, which will enhance law enforcement and border integrity on our shared waterways. On that front, we spoke about the need to finalize the negotiations we launched last year on a framework agreement that will formalize the shiprider operations.

What our government has repeatedly emphasized, both in formal meetings and in other ways, is that Canada wants our border with the United States to be a true gateway to our mutual prosperity, not a cumbersome checkpoint that stifles our competitiveness. The government has stressed that Canada is America's closest friend, most trusted ally, and most important trading partner.

Most recently, I spoke to Secretary Napolitano, and we do speak on a fairly regular basis. She assured me that the U.S. shares our views on the border and continues to be committed to getting Canada-U.S. border issues right.

Business of Supply

•(1255)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Napolitano confirmed to me that Canada will remain a trading partner with the full confidence of the United States and that our common goal is to strengthen our mutual security by ensuring that these security measures do not impede the significant trade relations of our two countries. I look forward to working with her again at our next meeting and presenting a border program that will protect the interests of Canada.

[*English*]

In sum, what we agreed upon were two principles: one of looking for opportunities to co-operate for mutual benefit, where we can eliminate redundancies and inefficiencies so that our border works well while we are achieving our security objectives; and secondly, we agreed to look at new approaches and new initiatives, ones that have been off the table under the previous administration. Those are, in my view, two major successful steps forward.

I believe we have with the new Obama administration a real opportunity to make progress for Canada. I continue to work with the Obama administration in seeking to do that.

In view of that, I simply cannot support the motion before us today. It is critically important that we maintain an open border. It is critically important that we have good relations with the Americans and that we make them aware of how important that border is.

One of the realities of the situation we are in is that because we are such good partners, because we are such trusted allies, we are not always on the radar screen. It is easy for North Korea and Iran to be the subject of a lot of talk in Washington. Canada is not.

In some ways, that is a good thing, but it also means that on those issues that are important to us we have to be there. We have to be there front and centre, making our views known, working on our concerns and getting those problems solved. The new Obama administration has shown a willingness to work with us to do that, a new opportunity for Canada, a new opportunity to work towards greater security and prosperity.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to continue working on that, and I would encourage all members of the House to support that kind of effort and reject this unnecessarily divisive motion really designed to embarrass the Obama administration.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not believe the motion from the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering was in any way intended to insult the American government. The fact is that the comments that Janet Napolitano made were extremely offensive to many people on a lot of different fronts. There is also a pile-on, with Senator John McCain, who has now backed up these allegations. It is not just with respect to border security, but the comments were on our immigration policies as well.

In speaking with small business owners in my riding, the concern of several of the manufacturers that export heavily to the United States is that these comments are a backdrop for the protectionist feeling they are getting from the U.S.

I would like the minister's comments about how I allay their fears in getting their goods across the border.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, first, I want to speak to the comments that Ms. Napolitano made. I found them curious myself, because when we met a month in advance of those comments being made in a CBC interview, we actually talked about the issue of the 9/11 terrorists and about how it was funny that Canadians always had to combat that myth. That is why I was very puzzled by her reaction.

I watched the interview and I felt that she was a little bit trapped by an interviewer. Certainly when I spoke with her and her staff immediately following the interview, she made it quite clear that she did not realize she had said what she was quoted as saying and actually did say. She was well aware that none of the 9/11 terrorists ever came through Canada and she issued a statement immediately to correct that record.

I think we as good partners should accept that and give her the benefit of the doubt. I know I certainly do.

As for John McCain, I cannot say the same for him. He had an opportunity when presented with the facts to accept that. That is why it is important that we have been vigilant, and the ambassador has, of course, communicated immediately with his office the need to address those kinds of myths. But we are not going to let that get in the way of continuing to work constructively with all Americans on improving our border situation.

•(1300)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was in Washington, leading a delegation of members and meeting with members of Congress while the Canadian ambassador and the minister went to meet with the highest levels of the administration. There is one thing I have a hard time understanding, despite the explanations the minister just gave us. The Minister of Public Safety met with the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security. One week after that meeting, that same individual said the 9/11 terrorists had gone through Canadian customs to carry out those attacks against the United States.

I trust the secretary of state, but I do not trust the Minister of Public Safety. During his meeting with the American Secretary of Homeland Security, he must have raised the question with her. How does he explain that, a week later—since the minister went to the U. S. two weeks ago—she made such a statement? The minister would do well to explain himself. At this time, he is the one who does not have our trust.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, let me be absolutely clear if there is any illusion. I do not believe any of the 9/11 terrorists ever came from Canada across the American border. I happen to know, as the 9/11 commission report examined and set out in great detail, that they did enter the United States from elsewhere. So I really have nothing to explain and I continue to hold that view. Even if the member may think there is something to explain there, I will not depart from that view, which I have held for quite some time.

Business of Supply

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois about the resolution that is before us today. Naturally, it is impossible to be against motherhood and apple pie, and the Bloc Québécois will obviously support the motion as written.

The motion is essentially about security, and I think that is important. Like our American colleagues, the Bloc Québécois and I have long understood the importance of security. Moreover, nearly 12 years ago, I began what is called a triangle of excellence involving Vermont, New York state and the riding of Saint-Jean. These states are my riding's closest neighbours, and I knew we had common interests. One of those important interests is border security.

In fact, I remember that it was often the main topic of discussion 12 years ago. My American colleagues, like us, said that it was important because the largest gateway between Quebec and the United States is at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle. The Americans are so convinced of its importance that they invested \$100 million in what is called a port of excellence in Champlain. They demolished the buildings and infrastructure at their land entry point and built new ones at a cost of \$100 million. Security is extremely important to them.

We also work regularly with the Americans on various issues. For example, we are currently working on the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Champlain, who gave his name to Lake Champlain on the American side. Border security is therefore important to us.

I also have a lot to do with the Border Security Agency, the part of the Department of Homeland Security that is in charge of border security. We meet with them on a regular basis. In addition, I recently instructed my office to proceed with an update, because I have not been there for a year or two and I want to go back.

We are also talking to our contacts at U.S. customs about how to ensure the uninterrupted flow of traffic so as not to create delays at the border. We also want to prevent illegal travellers from crossing the border, and I think that the Americans want that too.

That being said, we have to send the right signals and talk to the right people. The Conservative government says that it is concerned about security, but its actions do not support that. It is cutting out things that the Americans consider important.

What are we supposed to say to a U.S. member of Congress who asks us whether we have closed certain RCMP detachments over the years? Well, seven or eight RCMP detachments near the border have indeed been closed, and promises to reopen them have not been kept.

How are we supposed to explain to the Americans that the government supports restricting Canada Border Services Agency activities along the border? How do we justify eliminating procedures and operating practices that enabled the organization to move agents from one border crossing to another during busy times or heavy arrivals, and pay them overtime? That is not happening anymore.

As a result, trucks are going to get stuck in long line-ups even if border access points are separated. Trucks getting stuck five or six

kilometres away does not help the industry. Trucking companies often complain about this.

We also have to make the Americans aware that we have secure lanes. I gather that the minister is having trouble getting that message across to the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security. I can understand that because I just gave two examples of how the agency is causing traffic jams at the border and security problems by refusing to move border services agents from one crossing to another during really busy times.

● (1305)

We are sending a contradictory message. The Conservatives have failed to raise awareness among Americans. I point to the fact that, during the debate on WHTI, the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, which will soon require the use of passports at borders, it was the Bloc Québécois and I who led a delegation to Washington to convince our American friends to not go ahead with it. The only thing that happened was that implementation was delayed by one year. This initiative will go into effect on June 1.

There are other issues such as the enhanced driver's licence that contains a chip. It will be less expensive. This enhanced driver's licence will make border crossings by land easier. However, it cannot be used for air travel. Effective June 1, new rules will come into effect for land, water or air travel. Everyone is required to have a passport or, for land travel, the enhanced driver's licence I spoke about.

The signals sent by the Conservative government do not square with their philosophy, which is centred on security. There is not just the issue of the WHTI, but also that of protectionism.

At present, the winds of protectionism seem to be blowing very strongly in the United States. Two weeks ago, when the minister was in the U.S., I led a delegation of members to Washington to defend Quebec's and Canada's interests by asking them to not be overly protectionist. That is what we did.

Business of Supply

How did the Conservative Party react? The member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles objected to what we had done. He told us that we had no business being there. He asked us what we had done and who we had seen. Everything is on the Bloc Québécois website: the names of the nine congressmen and two senators we met with and the topics we discussed, including security at customs. We will not be lectured by the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles and the Conservative Party, who are wondering what we did in Washington. It seems to me that all the members of this House have four points in the year to go to Washington. We have to go to Washington. The Americans are our number one economic partners. We have to try to resolve our differences together. That is what we did. We do not agree that we had no business being there. We need to go there. The Conservatives may be asleep at the switch and not doing their job, but they cannot prevent others from doing their job. We are glad we went to Washington. I think it is our duty to go.

We cannot understand why the secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security would say such a thing when the minister had just met with her. The next time we go to Washington, we should perhaps ask to meet with her. Maybe things would go better if ordinary members met with her and explained how things really are.

When I say that the government is sending mixed messages, I am talking about the cuts to the agency and to overtime. That is going to cause delays at the border crossings. There is also the whole issue of the special team at Lacolle, where there is a giant scanner that was used to scan trucks one by one. The Conservative government decided to dismantle the team.

What message will that send? On the American side, that is what I was talking about earlier; the \$100 million port of excellence they have created has all that equipment. I know, because I saw it. Now, as I said earlier, I want to bring them up to date. What shall I say when the border agency security representative asks me why we are disbanding our team that works with the giant scanner? How are we going to respond? Those are different messages.

There are patrols on the Richelieu River, in my own riding. That area is a virtual sieve for drug traffickers and potentially illegal immigrants. We have just put an end to that. There was a border crossing right on the river, and we are told that it is finished. What other message does that send? What messages are we sending to our American colleagues? This government is trying to convince us that security is extremely important.

As a final point, our party is doing its best to make up for this government's shortcomings.

● (1310)

We are extremely disappointed in what is happening. We were right there less than two weeks ago. We met with nine members of Congress and two senators. We talked about that, and we even talked about American protectionism. We have some important allies in the American Congress and we must meet with them. A woman like Louise Slaughter from New York is very important to us. She joined us in our fight regarding the passport requirement at customs. She fully understood that it is important for the states that border Canada to remain as flexible and as open as possible.

Naturally, the Americans will say that they cannot take one approach with Canada and a different one with Mexico. It must be a joint policy. However, this should not stop us from trying to convince them that their northern border is quite different from their southern border. It is natural for them to have a lot more problems with their southern border than their northern border, since Canada has always been their ally. Canada has always made an effort to harmonize and be in tune with American policies.

Now we are hearing the opposite from the Conservative government. They seem to want nothing to do with security. When the time comes to do important things, such as ensure that we have competent border agents and border patrols and that traffic jams do not interfere with the Canada-U.S. economy, the Conservatives are nowhere to be found. That is inexplicable. We have to take charge of this issue.

If the Conservatives do not agree, I invite my opposition colleagues to go there and say so. I think that, at this time, we cannot count on the Conservatives, who say one thing but do another. That is basic. We cannot convince our American friends that we can do the job when we are doing the opposite of that. We are closing RCMP detachments. The border patrol is very slow off the mark. Overtime has been abolished, which will lead to serious bottlenecks at the Canada-U.S. border and the closure of the scanner and its team.

The Americans are going to think that the border is indeed porous, not to mention the fact that there are a lot of roads we do not monitor. The Americans now feel that they have to put cement blocks on their side of 107 roads going from Canada to the United States because we do not control those points. The U.S. does monitor its side of those entry points, sparing no expense. They have helicopters, patrols, vehicles and cameras. They are even talking about using UAVs—drones—to patrol their side of the border. We do not do any of that. We are still amateurs.

The government makes all kinds of lovely promises, but then it does not keep them or do anything about them, which does not do us any favours in Washington. We know that because we meet with them regularly and we talk about these things. The opposition's role is to put pressure on the government to do something to ensure that the Americans feel safe when it comes to our border. We want them to believe that their ally to the north is in control of its borders. We do not want any more situations like the Secretary of Homeland Security saying that terrorists came through Canada to perpetrate the September 11, 2001, attacks.

The first time I heard that, it was my friend, New York state senator Hilary Clinton, who said it. At a dinner in Plattsburgh in the context of the triangle of excellence, I was very keen to meet with her to tell her that she could not say that, that that is not what happened, and that the border in question was theirs. To make a long story short, I never heard Ms. Clinton say that again.

How is that a few years later, we are still hearing such things? Not only do we hear them, but we learned that the Canadian Minister of Public Safety met with her a week before she made that outrageous remark. This has proven very costly, financially speaking, since the entire diplomatic corps has had to mobilize to try to dispel this myth, as well as in terms of their perspective, that is, how the Americans see Canadians and Quebecers. They see us as people who do not look after our border. If we do not look after it, they will look after it for us, and they are talking tougher, which is not good for our economy.

• (1315)

What we want—and this is what I was saying when I began speaking—is for goods and traffic to flow freely at border crossings. We want people to be able to cross all borders, whether in Lacolle or elsewhere. However, we want the Americans to know that if people try to cross the border illegally, we are capable of stopping them. That is what they want to hear, and that is not what is really happening.

Of course, that is the thrust of our colleague's proposal. It is important and that is why the Bloc Québécois will support this motion in the House.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in just over a month, Canadians will be required to produce a passport or an enhanced driver's licence when they cross the border. The government has seriously dropped the ball on this whole file.

A year ago, when the Manitoba government was exploring enhanced driver's licences, it approached the passport department here in Ottawa to get it to issue a, more or less, passport light solution so the government would not need to duplicate services that should be provided by the passport office. Manitoba received no positive response out of the passport office or out of the federal government at the time.

The result is that Manitoba and British Columbia are developing their own enhanced driver's licence solution that will cost people \$30 for a card that will only get them across the border. A passport is the most sensible thing to have because it gives five years of protection and an individual can go anywhere in the world for a little over double the price of \$85.

We suggest that the passport office should be issuing passports at a much lower cost. As a matter of fact, passports for certain people, say those under 18 years of age, should be free. The government should be subsidizing the process by maybe cutting the price of a passport in half.

We will have a huge mess at the border in only a couple of months. I hold the government responsible for what should have been done a year ago.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleagues on his remarks. He is absolutely right.

I do not know if my colleague is aware of it, but Quebec has already issued enhanced driver's licences because the federal government dropped the ball. We are inevitably approaching the

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date, June 1, when passports will be mandatory, although enhanced driver's licences may be used in some cases.

The member is quite right: social and economic activities abound along the border. It is impossible to know how many people cross the border because they have family on the other side or because their children go across to play hockey, and vice versa.

The June 1 deadline will have consequences. A small family with three or four children may not be able to pay up to \$400 or \$500 for passports. It could use the enhanced driver's licence, but it can only be used to cross the border by land, and not by water or air.

Thus, there will be negative consequences on June 1 because the Conservative government has been negligent and did not monitor this issue. It could consider the proposed solution of variable fees for passports, simply not requiring everyone to pay the same \$87 amount.

Problems will arise on June 1. On both sides of the border, people may decide to stay home, which will obviously have a negative impact on the economy.

• (1320)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comments.

In New Brunswick, 90% of our exports are headed for the United States. These exports include wood products and seafood. Because we neighbour the beautiful province of Quebec, I know that some industries need help now, during the economic crisis. Will this problem with the borders, which the Conservative government caused because it does not know what is going on, create economic problems for Quebec, our neighbour?

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, that is essentially what we are saying today. We are talking about impacts on families, impacts on sport. Those are economic impacts. When people cross the border unto the United States or Americans come to Canada, inevitably they spend money. When there are delays at the border, companies pay a huge price. Carriers waste no time in passing on their costs to the companies that hired them. Some industries such as forestry and manufacturing are in the midst of an economic crisis.

In my opinion, the situation will get worse starting on June 1, because exporting companies may have to pay a bit more if there are long delays at border crossings. That has negative consequences across the board, and it is too bad the Conservative government has been negligent in this area.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech.

In terms of the economy, the Université de Montréal has studied the Conservatives' investments in border security. While we should be investing more in border security, they have cut funds, as my colleague mentioned. Some \$70 million has been lost in connection with border security. About \$42 million in salaries has been lost, along with \$32 million in added value.

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Given these undeniable numbers, not to mention the impact on tourism, it is clear that the federal government must invest more in border security. We know that a lot of tourists come to Quebec, and that has a major impact on tourism development, particularly given the economic crisis. I think that the Conservative government should act more quickly to save and create jobs. Would my colleague care to comment on that?

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his comments.

He mentioned a Université de Montréal study, but I would like to tell him that I have before me a Transport Canada study dated May 24, 2005. It is estimated that it will be between \$231 million and \$433 million, just for the delays that will be caused by the government's new policies. There have been many like that. This will not be without administrative costs. In terms of compliance with certain C-TPAT rules, C-TPAT being an American federal program, if the Canadian industry does not comply, the result is quite simple; it can no longer do business with the United States. The Americans apply security measures and Canada has no response. This will lead to tremendous losses for our economy as a whole. My colleague referred to a Université de Montréal study. I am talking about a Transport Canada study from 2005, and the situation is probably worse today.

• (1325)

[English]

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those of us who come from border municipalities fully understand the importance of issues at our border crossings. We know the government is committed to ongoing co-operation, open dialogue and concrete actions to advance our position and our interests at border crossings.

To date we have worked very strongly and successfully on delaying the WHTI implementation date. That has given both governments, as well as the general public, an opportunity to prepare for it. It will happen in June this year.

We also have the Canada-U.S. cross-border law enforcement and justice co-operation and integrated border enforcement teams. Does the member opposite agree with these IBE teams and what is his take on them?

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I may have forgotten to mention one more feather in my cap. I am also the co-chair of the border caucus with the United States.

I am not saying that the news is all bad. I am just saying that the Conservative government seems to be working on delaying the deadlines, but it is a little late for that. The government should have worked on that earlier, when the western hemisphere travail initiative was introduced.

The government should have gone to Washington immediately, as we did. But we were the only ones who made the trip at the time. Obviously, a backbencher does not carry the same weight as a prime minister or minister. I find it strange that now, just a few months before the initiative takes effect, the government is saying it is going to take steps to try to lessen the impact. It is already a bit late in the

game, and the provinces are having to create their own entry documents, because they know they cannot count on the federal government. That is the sad truth.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure today to speak to this important subject in the Liberal opposition day motion.

It is important that we look at the context as well when we talk about what is happening not only with regard to Napolitano's comments from the Department of Homeland Security, but also the WHTI, the western hemisphere travel initiative, the passport issue in particular, and how it is going to change the relationship of our countries. It already has had what I would say a cancerous effect on our relationship, one that has caused considerable economic grief for border communities.

I also argue that a social cultural change will happen. When our citizens engage with the United States, we have to remember they often could be cousins or marriage relatives. Businesses and personal contacts are now going to be extinguished. If we talk to different people, we will discover they have given up trying to cross the border on a regular basis.

My uncle and aunt live in the United States and they come to Canada on a regular basis. That is a good part of my family's life because they have been able to visit with my grandmother every week. It has put more strain and pressure on them, but we are lucky they continue to put up with it. At the same time, I know other Canadians have simply given up. The loss is very significant. It undermines the social fabric which has made Canada and the United States such great friends.

I think our citizens really get it. We recently heard commentary in the media, for example, by a Fox News journalist. In the past we saw footage of a Liberal member stomping on a doll of the president, yet citizens do not really engage in that. They say politicians are silly or the comments in the media are stupid. When they meet their friends, family and business partners, they recognize the real breadth and depth of their relationships and support it. However, that will change with the implementation of WHTI.

It is important to note that this goes back farther in time than the last number of months. For those who are not aware, I am from Windsor, Ontario. I walk down the steps of my house, look to the left down the street and see the Detroit River and the city of Detroit. I grew up and lived near the border and crossed on a regular basis as a child, an adult and now as a father. It is part of our relationship in terms of things we do for business and the way we construct our social relations. I worry about losing that aspect, a real benefit for our relations at the end of the day.

The first time I was really upset was during the former Chrétien government. I was in Washington, D.C. lobbying for softwood lumber. We had a meeting with the ambassador at that time. We had just learned the U.S. was going to implement what was called the NSER program. Originally 35 countries were on the list. It was the first time in history that people who were not American citizens had to be fingerprinted and photographed as they entered the United States.

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The Canadian position at that time was non-existent. There was no discussion by the ambassador, no discussion whatsoever. Canadians on the list, who happened to be born somewhere else, would be registered as if they were not Canadian citizens, and that has happened.

An example of that are people from Pakistan. People from Pakistan have lived in my community for over 100 years. Ironically, they are doctors and lawyers who go to the United States every day to save lives. They have been in Canada for 30 or 40 years, most of the entire lives, and they were to be treated differently by the Americans because of their place of birth.

The Canadian government of the day refused to challenge that. It let the United States unilaterally say that certain aspects of our citizens would be a threat. It did not care if they were doctors, or nurses, or workers or engineers in the automotive industry. These individuals would be treated differently than the rest of our citizens. I am not saying the U.S. does not have the right to do that because it does. The United States is a foreign and sovereign nation, but our government should have defended our citizens because a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian.

If we go through our vetting process through immigration, which originated 20, 30 years ago or whatever it might be, people are valued as a Canadian citizen with the same rights as someone else. That program has turned into the U.S. visit program, a much more comprehensive program. The U.S. is moving this even further, to have an entry and exit system to access the country in a general way, not just in terms of those who register any more. This will create more border issues.

• (1330)

It is important to recognize that. This was one of first times the government decided to not even challenge it, the Chrétien government. I have not heard a prime minister to date, not Prime Minister Paul Martin nor the current Prime Minister, say that once Canadian citizens have been vetted through our process, they should be treated the same way.

It is important to get that message out. It complicates our border situation, making it difficult not only for those individuals going through these different processes, but also the processing itself, which is causing significant delays.

I want to touch on another subject that is very important. We are watching this changing relationship, and again the government is doing nothing. This is related to a treaty dating back to 1817. Following the war of 1812, there was a treaty between Canada and the United States that there would be no gun boats or armed vessels on the Great Lakes system. However, in 2003, out of hysteria, the United States wanted to bring in gunboats, which are now on the Great Lakes.

Let me describe these gunboats. They have auto cannons on them. The auto cannons can fire up to 600 bullets a minute. I cannot imagine a threat coming from Canada that requires something like that. If someone is hit by 600 bullets in a minute, there is nothing left. Once again, the Liberals at that time allowed this and adjusted this treaty. Now we have this situation.

It is interesting to delve into the agreement. There has been a history where the government says it will not engage in this, that it has an agreement it can pursue someone across the boundary, for whatever reason. The RCMP can do it, or the coast Guard can do it. Apparently what is supposed to happen is if there is a pursuit, the auto cannons will be torn down and put it away and the ships will go back into Canadian waters. I have a hard time believing that.

What was phenomenal about this was the issue that followed, and it shows the complications as we allow this militarization. The U.S. wanted to set up 40 different gun ranges on the Great Lakes system, where it would have target practices. The issue of national security and the concerns of the Americans are important. However, this can really change the nature of a beautiful a relationship, sharing one of the most important treasures of the world, the Great Lakes fresh water tributary system. It is so important for our ecological habitat, our human population and our planet. This is one of the busiest waterways in the world. There are tankers, sport fishing, all kinds of other things.

We fought that. I raised questions in the House of Commons, but the government of the day just fluffed them off. In November 2006 I made a submission on behalf of the New Democratic Party. There was a process in place to make applications of interest to the American system. All our caucus colleagues signed it. I believe we were the only political party to do this.

The government's response to that came after the deadline of submissions. The Great Lakes system was being turned into live firing ranges and the government submitted its submission two days after the hearing process was to be completed. This showed the disinterest the Canadian government had with regard to those relations. We see how these things start to ramp up.

In that time period, as well, there was the agreement of the Canadian government to move toward operational centres, the first in Great Falls, which was an air wing branch. Now it has allowed for the introduction on our border of not only surveillance drone planes, but black hawk helicopters and chinooks as well. One flew by my house the other day. I cannot imagine what the threat was. We also have the gun boat ranges. We also now have watchtowers with security surveillance, which Boeing is putting up.

We have allowed all this to happen without any real analysis or without engaging the Americans. We have not asked questions such as what is so important. We all agree on security. We want to ensure there will be a decrease in smuggling and illegal immigration, a whole series of things.

We have allowed the hype to happen. That is why we have someone like Ms. Napolitano saying these things. It is quite political and clear. This is shifting the debate about the southern border of Mexico and the United States to the northern border here. Both the previous government and the government of the day have been very much asleep at the switch, not protecting the interests of Canadians. We have allowed this myth to continue and now the physical entities are there at this point in time.

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●(1335)

We could have engaged in a study. We could have engaged in a practical approach to this, or at least had that out there for them during this process. When one talks to the spokespeople for the Department of Homeland Security, their response to the Black Hawk helicopters, gun boats, surveillance and drone planes is that they do not know what is out there and it is a threat until they determine what it is out there. That is not a logical way to try to find and reduce the things we really want to get at the border. It allows the idea that we have an unsecured northern border and that just is not true.

The problem with 9/11 was that the terrorists got hold of American passports and other documentation legally and illegally, and they were able to carry out a terrorist attack that has changed the globe. There is no doubt that we need to be conscious of that, but at the same time, are the objectives we are adding today making us safer? I would argue they are not. The western hemisphere travel initiative in particular is not going to have the net effect we want in respect of counterterrorism. It is going to create greater economic harm than we could even imagine. That is going to hurt our ability to compete in the world and provide the funds for the security we want. That is a critical thing to note.

The Ambassador Bridge and other border crossings are two miles from my house. Along a two mile stretch of the area that I represent are the Detroit-Windsor tunnel, the CP Rail tunnel, the Ambassador Bridge and the Detroit-Windsor ferry, which has its material wastes. This carries about 40% of Canada's trade with the United States every single day. There is a lot of scrutiny there. The trucks are checked. There is gamma X-ray inspection.

Interestingly enough, I remember a campaign with a previous administration where we had a gamma ray facility. For those who are not aware of it, gamma ray technology is used on rail cars to find illegal substances, bombs or something else. Ironically, when this was debated in our community, the CBSA had agreed to put this facility next to a high school. We campaigned successfully to stop that and to move it away from there. We were told it was going to be moved. Later on, construction started right by the high school because the Department of Homeland Security told CP Rail to do it there. The platform is still there to this day. We finally got it moved again. That just shows the influence the Americans have here.

That screening is done. The rail cars go to the United States. That is important. We agree with a lot of it, but it has significant economic consequences. When we look at what is going to happen next with the WHTI, we need to go back to the beginning. When it comes into effect in just over a month it is going to be a new world for us. Back in April 2005 is when the Department of Homeland Security announced that passport legislation was going to be brought in. We have to wonder whether Canada did a good enough job with regard to this. I would say that we failed the test and continue to do so because we do not have any programs or support systems that are significant enough to deal with the challenges.

The previous government cannot be blamed for that situation in terms of being late off the mark. I asked David Emerson, the minister of industry at the time, about the issue of tourism two days after that. The government understood it was a concern. That was his response

to me and we took that at faith, but we followed up with testimony to the department of tourism in Canada a couple of days after that.

The response by Canada to one of the biggest challenges we are facing now was that we were going to put together a \$50,000 study to find out the effect of having passports to enter the United States. We spent \$17 million that year instead to move the head offices from Ottawa to Vancouver. That was the government's priority at that point in time. That was clearly political. It is something that gives me concern. Later on, we did get the government to increase the amount for the study. There has been some response to it, but it is very frustrating.

The New Democrats raised the issue a number of times in the House of Commons. It culminated in a House of Commons debate on October 24 about the fact that Canada did not have a position at that time. Canada finally submitted a position to the United States on October 31, which was the last day we could make submissions on the WHTI. The very last day was when we actually got our submission in, and it was only after we had a vote here in the House that we got it done.

●(1340)

I had previously made a submission on behalf of the New Democratic Party. It was signed by all our caucus members. It is important to recognize, as we enter this next chapter, that the government did not take this seriously and it still does not have its head around it. There is a lot of evidence to show there should have been a better response.

I have put together a Canadian tourism strategy. I am going to mention parts of it later, but I want to mention some of the great work that has been done that really validates the problem we are facing right now.

The Canadian Tourism Commission tabled a report which showed that there would be significant short-term and long-term effects. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Buffalo Niagara Partnership, the Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Detroit Regional Chamber commissioned a report in October 2005. Once again they were calling for a balance to be struck between national security and WHTI, but the fact is we could not find that balance.

A study by the Ontario ministry of tourism estimated that the number of U.S. visits to Ontario would decrease by 13.6%, or 3.2 million visits, in 2008. It is interesting because we have already seen the visitation from the United States drop to record lows. Not since 1972 have we seen the erosion of this type of exchange.

It is important to emphasize that this exchange is not just about economics. There is a social element that is incredibly important. It binds us as neighbours and partners in a very important relationship for our democracy and for our social cultures.

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In my region a whole bunch of people come in from the United States to see the markers of their relatives. Our area is at the end of the underground railroad. When the United States had slavery and Canada was free, people would swim or boat across the Detroit River. This was before it was channeled, so it was much easier to do that than it would be today. They would come to Canada to establish their lives. People have relatives and friends here. People from all over the deep south and other areas trace their heritage by following the underground railroad into Olde Sandwich Towne.

We are going to lose out on some of those visits. People can get into Canada without a passport, but getting back into the United States is going to be a big challenge. They will need other documentation or they could be held. They could be turned away, which would be interesting. If someone with an American passport comes to Canada, and then it is declared that the person cannot re-enter the United States because the person is a security risk, do we allow the person to come into our country again if the person is a security risk? Do we lock the person up or send the person back to the United States because we do not want to take a security risk?

An interesting quandary could develop out of this. Border agents will be making independent decisions all along the line. The main point is that we are going to miss out on the social-cultural exchange.

A study by the Conference Board of Canada showed that the implementation is going to have a negative impact. There is a very good survey by Zogby International of U.S. border-state voters and Canadians about new border regulations. Its findings are interesting: 51% of Americans feel that these rules will not keep terrorists out; 60% of Americans and 70% of Canadians do not think there is a need for an alternative border crossing card; and 86% of Americans and 75% of Canadians drive when they cross the border annually.

I want to conclude by emphasizing that we need a very aggressive strategy. The Prime Minister in particular has to show leadership. Over the last 20 minutes I have laid out the history of what has been happening. There has been an evolution of our border to become militarized and also to become thickened.

I have not even touched upon other elements of trade, such as the Bioterrorism Act, where because of a Chilean peach in 1986 there is now a big fee for service 10 or 15 years later. There are all kinds of other fees, such as the APHIS fee, in terms of transported goods coming in.

The Prime Minister needs to stand up and say that the Canadian border is different from the Mexican border, that it has different challenges, that we want to deal with those challenges, but at the same time, there is a responsibility in our trade agreements. There has to be a better way to provide safety and security for all of us.

• (1345)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the hon. member on his breadth of knowledge on the subject.

Many of the speeches today narrowed in on some damaging comments made by the homeland secretary. The opinion in the House seems to be that they were damaging remarks and the government has not been aggressive enough in correcting the image and damage done by those remarks. There is another body of

thought, however, that they were damaging remarks, an apology was made and everything is fine.

I would like to know where the NDP settle on this issue, where those members think work might be done at restoring the image and the truth behind the image that the border is secure, that we are good neighbours and partners with our friends in the United States and that the comments attributed were damaging and do not reflect the reality of our good, strong and friendly border.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, we need to deal with this in a much broader sense. Ms. Napolitano's comments are nonsense and hurtful and they create a lot of confusion. To suggest that people had a good chuckle over them is very insensitive to Canadians who are losing their jobs every single day because American companies are deciding to relocate their facilities back to the United States because the Canadian government will not do anything about it. That is the consequence. It is scaring off some of the investment. Not only is the economy bad now, but many companies have to decide on where they are going to invest in newer technologies as they upgrade their facilities. One of the things they are deciding to do is to look at the border again.

I will give the government credit for one thing, that it has a decent plaza location for the next border crossing in the Windsor-Detroit area. It has been a long fought campaign. There are some problems with what is proposed but at least there is something happening and I will give the government credit for that.

However, we need an overall strategy. We need an overall border position that would be responsible to harness this in. We have to start saying quite unequivocally to the United States that all Canadians should be treated equally and that we have some of the best security in the world.

• (1350)

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for Windsor West on his comments. He certainly speaks for all of us who represent border communities. A really challenging environment has been created by many Americans who do not seem to understand the facts.

In Sault Ste. Marie, for example, 800,000 vehicles a year cross the bridge back and forth between the United States and Canada. People cross the border for a myriad of reasons, trade, business, school or work. It is a relationship that has been built up over a number of years that used to be very friendly and easy. As a matter of fact we were moving to a place where there was hardly any disruption in travel back and forth until 9/11 happened. We all know the impact that 9/11 has had on the whole of the world and how that might have an important impact on cross-border activity.

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People have come into my office after they have experienced this thickening of the border and the very thorough review they have had to go through in meeting with the customs agents on the other side, and frankly, people just do not want to cross the border any more. That is not helpful. Certainly trade between the U.S. and Canada is important, but so is friendship.

I was wondering if the member's own day-to-day experience is the same as ours in Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his work in Sault Ste. Marie. There is actually a project that needs to get going and some support there would be very important. One of the best things the government could do is actually move the project's facility there.

My colleague is exactly right. I had to recently go to Washington as I was presenting to a number of different trade organizations. We were only three cars deep in the lanes and it took over one-half hour to get through the process. I have no problem with checking out the documentation, my vehicle and everything else. They were fine with me, but it would be good if there was some overnight scrutiny. If they are going to detain vehicles for long periods of time, they should move them to secondary inspection.

That is one of the reasons I believe we need to start advocating for an overall border position. In my region we do not even have a border authority. Despite the fact that we have a key part of Canada's land border trade, we do not actually have any border authority for the region. That is different than Niagara Falls, Buffalo, Sault Ste. Marie, Fort Erie. All those places have that. I would actually advocate to monitor that. People are getting discouraged and turning away.

It is interesting when we look at what is happening on our north-south border. It is totally different in terms of inspection versus cargo coming into the country from the ports. I think it is 5% of cargo that is actually inspected. Meanwhile, we could have auto parts for say the mini-van in Windsor that will go across the border six times before it is actually in its final compact form. I would encourage people to use their stimulus and buy a mini-van from Windsor right now. They are good deals.

At any rate, that will have a lot more scrutiny than some of the cargo coming from overseas in containers which is really incredible because we have an integrated industry.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has failed miserably to promote the NEXUS program, an enhanced driver's licence which would speed traffic across the border. The government has failed to promote cheaper passports which would help alleviate the problem. I would like to ask the member from Windsor what he thinks the economic consequences will be as of June 1 because of the government's inaction over the last couple of years?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, it is going to be significant. NEXUS is a good example where we actually have NEXUS lanes that do not even have staffing or NEXUS lanes at certain times where the staff are pulling every vehicle aside and actually checking them which defeats the whole purpose. There are also NEXUS lanes where people cannot get their car to because there is not enough

space in the physical part of the actual border. Therefore, a lot of work needs to be done.

On the reciprocal point, which I did not get a chance to get into and it is really important, the government really has not woken up to this yet. We have the summer coming which is a challenge. I know right now that border and customs availability is diminishing and we are going to have longer lineups coming into Canada which is going to create a significant problem.

Before we would have students at certain border points that were trained and were part of the border process, interviewing people entering the country. Those positions are being eliminated as well and there has not been a backfill of them. Therefore, we have a significant problem coming up with not having the proper customs facilities at the border points and it is being raised by businesses already.

• (1355)

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his statements and his discussion which I think is adding to our motion today. However, not only are there physical border cities but increasingly we recognize that every city in Canada with an international airport is also a border city and that the lineups at airports are significant as well. The cross-border traffic of business people as well as tourists are also of a concern. I am wondering if the member could comment on that.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting and important part that has not had a lot of discussion but it too is critical especially at international airports.

If we do not have the staffing component there, it can be quite frustrating for the tourism industry. Interestingly enough as well, and I shared this with my American colleagues, now that Canadians are being forced to get a passport they are also choosing other destinations. Before, they chose to go to the United States, but now Canadians are making other changes because when one has a passport one is looking at travelling the world versus just the United States.

I have been hammering away with this message to them and they are taking an interest in that, especially the members from Florida and California who before relied upon that captive audience.

The hon. member is right. If we do not have that reciprocal staffing component by the United States and Canada and we do not have the monitoring of it, its diminishment will create problems. I also hear many complaints at different times on how the staff at border facilities are being treated at these airports. There is a critical component and now with air travel diminishing there will be the temptation to lower the amount of staffing at these facilities.

I hope that is not the case. Business travel as well as other travel is there. That is why I believe we should be making sure that we reinforce the civil service as opposed to taking it away. If we do, more people will get frustrated and stop taking trips, business or personal travel, and will find other means. I think that diminishes opportunities.

Statements by Members

For all that is said about web conferencing and so on, there is still nothing like the human to human conversation and a meeting together in a business environment. That is still really important. I view this as very critical for our future. It connects us to the rest of the world. If we do not have that capability, if people pull back out of frustration, we will lose another opportunity.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, recognizing that the government has dropped the ball and failed to promote NEXUS or cheaper passports, I would like to ask the member what he thinks the government should be doing in the short run to make up for past failures and to get more passports into the hands of people who need them at a much lower cost than currently is available?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, NEXUS is really important. Some large businesses do have successful ventures with it, but some of the medium and smaller businesses have a more difficult time finding the time and the process to go through NEXUS.

I would like to see a government program that is based on a certain time period to roll out an aggressive approach to get people to sign up with NEXUS and facility management, to help people re-enroll, and also to get through the process. We could also have a waiving of the fee, or a partial waiving of the fee. There needs to be that assertive approach to move forward.

That would be very helpful especially when we look at some of the medium-sized businesses that have not fully engaged in NEXUS or that do not have the capability to follow through because they have cut back so much or they are just basically run by one or two operators. To me that would be one of the things that we could do in the short-term that would be very advantageous. It would not only move that individual customer's border material through but would also ensure that it opens up lanes for other people, and that is a combination.

That is something I have been pushing any of the levels of government to do since we have had this program because we hear from different people in the constituency and also across the country that they would like to do NEXUS, but they cannot find the time, or they do not want to go through the paperwork, or they do not even know whether it would be worthwhile. This is one of the things we have to sell them on that because I think it is worth it for us all.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

TOURISM

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians face the challenges of the worldwide economic slowdown, many folks may be changing their vacation plans this summer. Why do they not choose Canada's beauty for their summer holidays?

In my neck of the woods there are many wonderful sights to see and lots of things to do, not more than an hour and a half from downtown Toronto.

Northumberland—Quinte West is perfectly situated between Toronto and Montreal, and provides a myriad of vacation choices for people of all ages and economic means.

Northumberland's rolling hills are full of great places to stay the night, while people fill their days visiting museums, artist studios and many wonderful shops and restaurants.

In Quinte West the fishing on the Trent River and the Bay of Quinte are unmatched in Ontario, and if someone just needs to get away for the day, why not choose one of the beautiful beaches on Lake Ontario or Rice Lake?

I invite all my colleagues and their constituents from across Canada to come to Northumberland—Quinte West this summer to experience its wonderful natural attractions and very friendly people.

* * *

LEADERSHIP INITIATIVES

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to an inspirational boy in my riding of Richmond Hill, Bilal Rajan who, at the age of 12, has demonstrated leadership beyond his age.

Since he was four years old, he began raising awareness on various children's issues and throughout his life already, he has been appointed as a child ambassador for UNICEF Canada. He founded Hands for Help and recently published a book, *Making Change: Tips from an Underage Overachiever*.

Last week, in celebration of International Volunteer Week, he spearheaded the barefoot initiative, where he walked barefoot for a week to understand what it would be like to walk in another child's shoes. In developing countries, children walk for miles in their bare feet every day to fetch water or go to school.

It is vital that we have young people like Bilal who can voice their concerns and participate in these positive initiatives. His actions are truly inspiring and remind us here in Canada and across the globe that we are never too young to make a difference. It can be done one step at a time, barefoot or not.

* * *

[Translation]

MARTIN GRAY

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Ms. Isabelle Saint-Hilaire, guidance counsellor at Val-Mauricie secondary school, who has invited the famous Franco-American Jewish writer, Martin Gray, to speak to the students of her school today.

As an adolescent, Martin Gray experienced the horrors inflicted by the Nazi regime. Later, his wife and four children perished in a forest fire. He became a writer to give his life purpose. Mr. Gray has received more than 800,000 letters from people who told him that his story has renewed their sense of purpose.

Prior to the arrival of Mr. Gray, all students were required to read *For Those I Loved*, discuss it in class and prepare questions for the speaker, who said that he is delighted to visit Shawinigan.

Statements by Members

Congratulations to Martin Gray for his message of courage and hope and kudos to Isabelle Saint-Hilaire for this remarkable initiative.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, nothing is more important to Canadians than their family's good health, so it is understandably frustrating that we must fight the same battles again and again to beat back new attempts to undermine medicare. We are suffering from privatization creep.

This month, the member for Winnipeg North joined me in addressing a packed hall of constituents angry about proposed cuts to health care. I promised to share these fears with the House.

Services are being delisted and de-insured. Cuts are being made to pharmaceuticals and vision care. Seniors are forced to buy health insurance. Expanded private medical clinics are drawing doctors away from our already understaffed public health care system.

Canadians expect the federal government to respect the underlying principles of universal health care, the very principles that are envied by other nations.

Health care may not be front page news these days, but it is certainly top of mind for my constituents and likely for many Canadians who have lost their jobs, their income and their health plans.

The government must implement the long promised universal pharmacare, spend more on senior care, and extend, not slice, coverage. It is not a question of whether we can—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre.

* * *

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to congratulate the government for introducing its recent legislation to combat identity theft in Canada.

Organized crime and modern technology are changing the criminal landscape with new and rapidly-evolving technologies, making identity theft easier than ever. It has become a more serious problem for Canadians than ever before.

In 2004 I introduced a private member's bill to target this very problem. That bill would have made it an offence for a person to be in possession of or to transfer, without lawful excuse, any information or document that could be used to identify another person.

I commend the government for Bill S-4, which will help in combating the complex and serious problem of identity theft. I call on all parties to support this important piece of legislation that stands to benefit all Canadians.

● (1405)

ARTS AND CULTURE

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, B.C. has taken over Ottawa in a bloodless coup and the citizens love it.

From April 21 to May 3, British Columbian artists, singers, musicians, actors, dancers, vintners and chefs will hit the boards and the art galleries, the libraries and the pubs bringing with them some of the most innovative and avant-garde talent this city has ever seen.

People should see the critically acclaimed aboriginal musical, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, or *BIOBOXES* and the *Wen Wei Dance*. or listen to Jim Burns, Ndidi Onukwulu and Alex Cuba, or view exhibits by Marina Roy, Abbas Akhavan and Brendan Tang.

If that is not enough to fill people's soul, they can drink exquisite B.C. wine, taste delicious Pacific cuisine and be mesmerized by the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra.

Though we are young, the diversity of our arts and culture in B.C. shimmers with innovation and fusion bands, like *Delhi 2 Dublin* and *DJ Spoon*, testify to that.

Ottawa is agog with delight. Events are packed. I urge members to go and be a part of the B.C. scene. It is a happening event.

* * *

WARREN GOLDRING

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a descendant of five Goldring brothers who arrived in Upper Canada from England in the 1820s passed away April 14.

Warren Goldring epitomized all that Canadians aspire to. In 1957 he founded AGF, American Growth Fund, stewarded today by his son Blake. Warren was Ernst & Young's Ontario Entrepreneur of the Year for 2002 and recipient of the Queen's Jubilee Medal.

Warren Goldring continued the belief in education of his father, who was Toronto's Director of Education. Warren's interest in national and international issues led him to sponsor the Goldring Chair in Canadian Studies at the University of Toronto, support the Canada Institute at Washington's Woodrow Wilson Center and be the founding director of Operation Dialogue to support Canadian nationalism and unity.

Distinguished business leader, author, visionary and avid trout fisherman, Warren Goldring lived a truly full life. He leaves his wife, Barbara, and his children, Blake, Jane, Bryce and Judy, and 11 grandchildren. His contribution to family and country will long be remembered.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

COPYRIGHT

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, illegal downloading is hurting artists. They get nothing for their work, while Internet service providers benefit from it.

The Copyright Act does not contemplate the impact of new technologies, such as the Internet, and it should be amended as quickly as possible. Everyone deserves to be compensated for their work, so we must ensure both that creators receive their due and that consumers can take advantage of this new way to access their work.

Bill C-61, which the Conservatives introduced in June 2008, demands no accountability from the industry. Instead, it attacks consumers, who pay Internet service providers for access.

In honour of World Intellectual Property Day, which was yesterday, the members of the Bloc Québécois will ensure that the new Copyright Act is fair and does a decent job of protecting creators' work.

* * *

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is National Victims of Crime Awareness Week and this year's theme is "supporting, connecting, evolving". It presents a perfect opportunity to raise awareness about victim issues and about the programs, services and laws in place to help victims of crime.

I know one party in this House that will not be taking part in the events to mark this national week, and that is the Bloc Québécois. For purely ideological reasons and because of its narrow-mindedness, it systematically refuses to support any motion or bill that could help victims of crime. The Bloc votes for criminals and against victims.

Barely a week ago, the Bloc voted against Bill C-268, which would establish minimum sentences for people convicted of certain offences committed against young people, particularly, sex-related offences and trafficking of children. That is unacceptable.

The Bloc has the interests of criminals at heart, not the interests of Quebeckers.

* * *

[English]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the safety of those who make their living on the sea is an ever-present concern and a personal priority for me.

The recent tragic loss of 17 lives in a helicopter crash en route to offshore oil operations off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador has returned the question of the need for a dedicated search and rescue unit to be located in St. John's, to the forefront of public awareness.

Recommendations made in the wake of the 1982 *Ocean Ranger* inquiry included the introduction of such a dedicated helicopter,

fully equipped to search and rescue standards to be operated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

I ask the government to take action on the issue and begin by conducting a full review of the search and rescue coverage in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. A review is the appropriate first step to ensuring the continuous and comprehensive coverage needed is in place to safeguard those who work on the sea.

* * *

● (1410)

TAXATION

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, \$20 billion of additional tax cuts by the Conservative government will leave more money in the hands of Canadians. It will assist to help the economy to grow during these tough economic times.

However, the Liberal Party has a plan for dealing with the economic situation as well. It plans to raise taxes on Canadian families. The Liberal leader recently said, "We will have to raise taxes".

Anybody with a basic understanding of economics knows that cutting taxes, like our Conservative government is doing, encourages economic growth, while raising taxes, like the Liberal Party is pushing for, discourages economic growth. This is not the time to be discouraging economic growth.

Canadians have a right to know how many taxes the Liberals want to hike, how much they will raise them by and which Canadians they will go after to get more money under the new Liberal tax grab.

* * *

NORTHERN ONTARIO COMMUNITIES

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my riding of Sault Ste. Marie, like many places, is facing hard times with this recession: layoffs, questions about pensions and belt-tightening. While we work hard to recover, I was reminded while attending a number of events this past weekend of the resiliency of our people and our communities.

Friday night, a full hall turned out for the United Way volunteer recognition banquet. Saturday night, the city's highest honour, the Medal of Merit, was presented to four recipients: Celia Ross, Patti Gardi, Dennis O'Reilly and Don Watson, and the Police Association honoured its retirees at a dinner.

Tonight, in Sudbury, Sir James Dunn music teacher, Mark Gough, will receive the Best Engineer award at the sixth annual Northern Ontario Music and Film Awards. Another nominee is fellow Saultite, Rusty McCarthy.

As New Democrats work for real solutions to this recession, I also want to celebrate the resiliency of our people and those making outstanding contributions.

*Oral Questions***FIREARMS REGISTRY**

Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP MPs who all campaigned passionately against the long gun registry failed their constituents last week.

For example, NDP members representing the Western Arctic and Timmins—James Bay say that they want to end the gun registry when they are back home but here in Ottawa they cannot help but feel the pressure of their own NDP leader and colleagues and decided to sit on their hands and continue punishing rural Canadians, duck hunters and farmers.

Canadians should know that these MPs tell their constituencies what they want to hear when in their constituencies and then come to Ottawa and do the exact opposite.

NDP members for the Western Arctic and Timmins—James Bay may have avoided the wrath of their party leader but now their constituents know that on issues that matter their MPs cannot be counted on to stand up and vote.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL VICTIMS OF CRIME AWARENESS WEEK

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, National Victims of Crime Awareness Week runs from April 26 to May 2 this year. It is a time to reflect on victims' issues and the programs and measures that are in place to help their families and friends.

That is why I would like to take this opportunity to call on all the members of this House to support Bloc Québécois Bill C-343. Like the legislation already in force in Quebec, this bill would amend the Canada Labour Code so that relatives of victims of crime could receive financial support for up to 52 weeks, which would give them time to work through their grief and get on with their lives.

If passed, this initiative, which is supported by the Murdered or Missing Persons' Families' Association of Quebec and its chair, Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu, would provide an opportunity for this government to set aside political partisanship and show sensitivity, compassion and solidarity towards the friends and families of these victims.

* * *

• (1415)

[*English*]

ATLANTIC BALLET THEATRE

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Atlantic Ballet Theatre, based in Moncton, New Brunswick, grew from the dream of one woman, Susan Chalmers-Gauvin, in 2001. Since then, it has toured the world to critical and audience acclaim. In fact, the troupe just got back from rave reviews in Brooklyn, New York.

[*Translation*]

Atlantic Ballet Theatre performs nationally and internationally and is known for its high level of professionalism. It is also the only professional ballet company in Atlantic Canada. The company is

committed to forging ties with the community, especially young people and seniors.

[*English*]

They have created seven full feature works and over twenty shorter works. Now the company is looking forward to the future with optimism.

The arts are a gauge for where our citizens are in mind, spirit and body. This is why we all need to do what we can to support arts organizations like the Atlantic Ballet Theatre. Its commitment to artistic excellence moves us all and creates a better society for everyone.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government understands Canadian families. Our Conservative government delivers results for Canadian families.

With our economic action plan, we are reducing the tax burden on Canadian families. We are providing stimulus spending that will create jobs. We are helping Canadians who are hardest hit by this global recession.

In contrast, the Liberal Party has promised to impose a job-killing carbon tax, to raise the GST and to end the universal child care benefit. In a pattern of announcing policies that will hurt Canadian families, the Liberal leader recently said, "We will have to raise taxes".

We appreciate his honesty but Canadians want to know how much this new policy will cost them. The Liberal leader should stand in this House and tell Canadians which taxes the Liberals will raise, by how much they will raise them and who will be forced to pay these higher taxes. Canadians deserve to know.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

HEALTH

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are worried about swine flu. There are six confirmed cases in Canada: four in Nova Scotia and two in British Columbia. Two Quebecers may be infected and other cases might be confirmed shortly.

What measures is the government proposing in response to this situation?

[*English*]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I answer the question, I would like to offer my sympathies to people in Mexico on the impact of the earthquake. My thoughts and prayers go out to them.

Oral Questions

Canada is well positioned to deal with this issue. We have a national plan for disease outbreaks and we are following it. I am having regular discussions with our international partners, including Margaret Chan, who is the director-general of the World Health Organization; the U.S. Secretary of Health, Charles Johnson; and Jose Cordova, the Mexican health minister.

I have also spoken with my provincial and territorial colleagues over the weekend, our counterparts across Canada, and provided them with updates on the situation. Our departments are working very closely together. We have—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the health minister for the information she has given us, but I want to ask a further question in relation to this matter.

India and Malaysia are warning their citizens not to travel to Canada. I want to know what steps the government is taking to ensure not only that Canadians are protected at home, but also that foreign governments are fully aware of the measures our government is taking to protect Canadians.

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we are engaged with the Departments of Foreign Affairs, Public Safety, Citizenship and Immigration, and Transport to ensure a coordinated response on this.

In Canada, we have issued a notice to all travellers. That notice is for individuals travelling to Mexico, and from Mexico to Canada, to be aware of the situation, to be aware of the symptoms, to wash their hands continuously and to cover their mouth when they cough. That is what is in place at the moment. We are working together to address the situation and are monitoring the situation very closely with our international partners.

• (1420)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the agriculture sector in Canada, and especially in Quebec, depends every year on the help of thousands of seasonal workers who come from Mexico.

What will the government do to ensure that these workers can continue to contribute to Canadian agriculture without posing a risk?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his important question.

With respect to Mexican workers and visitors, we have taken additional measures to safeguard the health of Canadians. In response to the situation, all foreign or temporary workers from Mexico now must undergo a health examination before leaving for Canada. This includes a questionnaire, a physical exam and temperature readings by two doctors. This examination must be done before leaving for Canada.

[*English*]

SRI LANKA

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question on the subject of Sri Lanka. I would like to ask the government a very direct question about the comments that have been made recently by the president of that country, who said in a statement that was released today that he had instructed the army to stop doing what he had claimed earlier they had not been doing, that is to say, “Our security forces have been instructed to end the use of heavy calibre guns, combat aircraft and aerial weapons”, which have caused civilian casualties.

I wonder if the government could tell us what steps it is taking to ensure the protection of those 50,000 to 60,000 civilians who still find themselves in what has now been euphemistically called, in an Orwellian tone, “a no-fire zone”. Could the government please tell us what it is doing about that?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the civil conflict in Sri Lanka, which has endured for over two decades, is very tragic, as the hon. member knows. On April 26, Canada, together with other G8 nations, issued a statement calling on all parties in the conflict in Sri Lanka to take all necessary actions to avoid further civilian casualties, and strongly condemning the use of civilians as human shields by the Tigers.

I must also say, as the hon. member would know, that the foreign ministers of Britain, Sweden and France are going to Sri Lanka, with full support from this government as well in that engagement, to tell the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, I asked the same minister why he was not going to Sri Lanka. That was before his colleagues' trip was announced.

So let me ask the government once again, where is Canada, where is the voice of Canada, speaking loud and strong in defence of humanitarian values, in defence of our long-standing relationship with all the people of Sri Lanka, including the Tamil population? Why is our minister not going to Colombo on Wednesday with those other foreign ministers and fighting for the values of which Canada is so proud?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the hon. member that this government has been engaged in the file on Sri Lanka. In fact, the hon. member on the other side has publicly stated that this government has done an excellent job on the file on Sri Lanka.

Let me also tell the hon. member that the foreign affairs minister has called the foreign ministers of India and all the other countries. We are working internationally to address this issue.

Again, let me remind members, the hon. member said we are doing a good job.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Quebec was the first to harmonize its sales tax with the GST. Over the years, the federal government has come up with all manner of excuses for not compensating Quebec. Recently, the Minister of Finance said that he would not compensate Quebec unless the province handed over the responsibility for tax collection to the federal government.

Can the Prime Minister tell us whether his condition is a sine qua non?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I talked to Quebec's new finance minister today. We will be talking about compensation. A truly harmonized model would support investment, growth and jobs.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is all very nice, but I did ask him a question.

He wrote a letter to the newspapers saying that there was one condition: there would be no compensation unless Quebec stopped collecting its tax.

So I will ask my question again. He wrote in the papers that Quebec would not be compensated unless the condition was agreed to. Is that a sine qua non or not?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the article that the hon. member is referring to was in *La Presse* and was authored by me. It did not set preconditions. It described the way harmonization works in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador, and how it will work in the province of Ontario. We cannot have different harmonization schemes. By definition, "harmonization" means harmonized, and we are prepared to harmonize.

As I say, I am open to discussions with the new minister of finance in Quebec. In fact, I spoke with him earlier today on another subject.

* * *

[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government's assistance plan for forestry companies is not enough, but that has not prevented the Minister of Finance from going abroad to tell everyone about it. The plan includes \$2.7 billion in loan guarantees for the automotive industry in Ontario, but the government is refusing to give the forestry industry the same treatment.

Can the economic development minister explain why loan guarantees, which are legal for the automotive industry, would not be legal for the forestry industry?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we announced previously, my colleague, the Minister of

Natural Resources, and I have set up a task team with members from the Province of Quebec and the Government of Canada. This team has been working for some time to address six issues facing the forestry industry. That includes analyzing access to credit. The team will report its findings by May 15.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister's job is to support Canada's defence of the forestry industry, not the opposite. His words bolster the American position and undermine Canada's arguments in London.

Is the minister aware that he is adding weight to the American claims when he says that loan guarantees are illegal? That is not the minister's job.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, if my colleague had listened to my answer, he would have known that he just made that comment for nothing.

Fifty per cent of the wood and softwood lumber processed in Quebec mills is exported, and 96% of those exports go to the United States.

If we want to protect Quebec's and Canada's forestry industry, we need to make good use of every possible argument. We must not play politics, but really work for the men and women in the industry.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no question that Canadians are gripped by this flu epidemic. One Canadian who has been tragically caught up in the crisis is 29-year-old Victoria George from Toronto, who suffered an acute asthma attack in Cancun.

According to the medical personnel, she has been nowhere near Mexico City. She contracted this critical bronchial attack prior to the outbreak of the flu, and her condition is in no way medically linked to the flu outbreak. Her family is fearing that if she is not brought back to Canada immediately, she could lose her life.

Will the Prime Minister use all the powers at his disposal to attempt to bring Victoria home as quickly as possible?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our officials are working very closely with the organizations in Mexico in regard to this situation, and we are working very closely with the family to bring that individual back to Canada.

* * *

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is more bad news on the economic front today. We learned from General Motors that 6,000 more Canadians are going to be thrown into the streets. For communities like Ingersoll and Oshawa that have been the backbone of our manufacturing economy, this is a huge blow.

The economic prescriptions of the Prime Minister are clearly not working, and it is the middle class that is taking the brunt of the hit.

Oral Questions

Does the Prime Minister understand that more has to be done? Will he fix the EI system that was broken by the Liberals before the government took power, and will he do something to bring a second stimulus package that will work?

• (1430)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have made a number of improvements and extensions to the EI system that has been in place with the previous Liberal government for a number of years. The member voted against each and every one of those, even before he read what was in the budget.

There has been an extension of EI benefits by five weeks, a work-sharing program to ensure people can continue to work and not get laid off, and excessive funds put into worker training, retraining and skills upgrading. The member voted against each and every one of those provisions.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's broken promises are piling up. He said that the Parliamentary Budget Officer should be independent and receive all information, but that is not the case. He said that infrastructure money would be distributed quickly, but that is not the case. He said that he would put an end to patronage, but he appointed his friend John Weissenberger to the Canada Foundation for Innovation.

Why is the Prime Minister breaking promise after promise?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Parliamentary Budget Officer reports to the Parliamentary Librarian and he reports to you. As such, this question is out of order, unless you wish to answer it.

The real reason the member is distracting from budgetary matters is that he has pushed for higher taxes on Canadian business, just as the Liberal leader has pushed for higher taxes on Canadians. The Liberal leader said, "We will have to raise taxes".

We strongly disagree on this side. We will cut taxes, because we are on the side of people who earn a good living with a lot of hard work.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Health for her call yesterday.

After a quick reading of the main estimates, it appears that there is \$12 million less this year for emergency preparedness response than last year in the Public Health Agency of Canada's budget, which includes pandemic preparedness and response.

Will the Minister of Health unequivocally assure this House that there will be adequate resources available to respond to this threat of a flu pandemic and ensure an adequate supply of antivirals?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government's highest priority is the health, safety and security of all Canadians. That is why in budget 2006 we invested \$1 billion to increase Canada's preparedness to respond to public health threats, including an influenza pandemic.

The Public Health Agency of Canada, working with the provinces and territories, has developed a comprehensive pandemic influenza plan. This plan, for example, includes a domestic vaccine capacity and stockpiling of antivirals.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the minister for the briefing this morning. We were told there are 55 million doses in the antiviral stockpile. I understand that the chief public health officer and the CFO of the Public Health Agency are in negotiations with Treasury Board to buy more.

Will the minister assure Canadians that sufficient money will be provided for whatever the agency officials deem necessary to protect Canadians?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yes. The Public Health Agency of Canada is working with the provinces and territories. Unlike the United States, the provinces and territories already have a stockpile of antivirals in their hands and they will continue to make the decisions as to when to use that.

As the member is well aware, we have six confirmed cases in Canada. As the need arises, we will assess the situation.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if we assume that the health of Canadians is a priority, that health can only be guaranteed through preventive measures and that this prevention requires adequate funding, then why was the recent budget of the Public Health Agency of Canada cut by the incredible amount of \$12 million for preparing and responding to a pandemic such as the one now shaping up?

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's highest priority is the health, safety and security of Canadians. In budget 2006, we invested \$1 billion to increase Canada's preparedness to respond to public health threats, including the influenza pandemic.

This year alone, our government invested \$24 billion in transfers to the provinces and territories to deliver health care in the areas of prevention. They are responsible for the delivery of health care.

Oral Questions

●(1435)

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at at his scrum this morning, the Minister of State (Agriculture) was not clear about what will happen to seasonal Mexican workers. The Quebec agriculture sector, in particular, is very dependent on these workers, as he knows. They have already started arriving in Canada.

He says that two doctors will be assigned to monitor 15,000 Mexican workers. However, can he guarantee that the workers will be examined before setting foot on the plane? Although we are hoping for the best, if something does happen, is there a plan B to replace these workers? Farmers need them.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

As I stated earlier, we have put additional measures in place. There are considerably more than just two doctors available to check the temporary Mexican workers. What this means is that there will be two doctors checking each temporary worker who arrives in Canada. Naturally we will be monitoring the situation closely. If other measures are needed, we are prepared to take them.

* * *

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the more things change, the more they stay the same. Just like the Liberals, the Conservatives are using Canada Day to spew their propaganda. Their desire to force-feed Quebec like some sort of goose forms a sharp contrast to other areas of activity, especially tax harmonization, the forestry industry and equalization, areas in which Quebec is not receiving its fair share.

How else can the minister explain his determination to invest \$3.2 million in Quebec for Canada Day, out of a total budget of \$3.7 million, in other words, 85% of it, if not for his objectionable desire for propaganda and visibility?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those figures are completely inaccurate. The program that the member is talking about is worth \$6.7 million. What she is saying is completely false, as usual.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after the sponsorship scandal, the Conservative government said it would do things differently than the Liberals did, and that transparency would be a priority.

With this Canada Day file, does the minister not realize that he is doing the same thing as the Liberals, by using government money to spew their propaganda in Quebec?

[English]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, leaving aside the factual inaccuracies that my colleague talks about with regard to the specific program, she is talking about the celebrate Canada program.

We are doing things differently from the Liberals. In 2006, the *Ottawa Citizen* did an analysis of celebrate Canada. The records

found that after the 2004 election, 79% of funding went to projects based in Liberal ridings.

When we invest in this country's arts and culture communities, we are doing it for the best interests of all Canadian, not just friends of the Liberal Party.

* * *

*[Translation]***PUBLIC SERVICE**

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the vice-president of the Public Service Alliance pointed out that the 75/25 policy covers federal jobs, not office space. Simple logic applies: Gatineau wants its fair share of the federal presence because of the economic spinoffs.

Will the Conservative government quit its word games, accept its responsibilities and correct this injustice, which has been going on for far too long?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

The Minister of Public Works and Government Services is well aware of this issue. Analysis is ongoing and, as always, he will act on his responsibilities.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, like the Liberals, the Conservatives have abandoned the Outaouais. For every dollar this government spends, just a penny and a half goes to our region. The research centre situation is just as bad. There are 27 of them in Ottawa and not a single one in Gatineau, which means that our region has been deprived of 1,500 jobs.

How can the minister expect anyone to believe him when he talks about job creation in the Outaouais when, as the employer, he is unable to give Gatineau its due?

●(1440)

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services is waiting for the analyses. I would remind the member who asked the question that Quebec means all regions of Quebec, and that the Minister of Public Works is analyzing the presence of the federal government not only in Quebec, but in all provinces with an eye to fairness.

* * *

*[English]***AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY**

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian economy received another blow with a 60% reduction of GM's workforce, a number far greater than originally projected. The loss of four GM brand names will close over 300 dealerships with 15,000 more jobs lost. Losses are cascading.

Oral Questions

Every dealer, auto worker and analyst tells me that the government's reaction is too little, too late, with the minister simply taking instructions from the U.S. Announcements with nothing deployed do not help.

When will the government finally show leadership and respond to this crisis with immediate solutions?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the ex-auto critic for the question.

We have been working daily with American officials and with the McGuinty government in Ontario for a comprehensive solution but the fact is that GM must restructure itself in a severe and quick way in order to ensure that it can survive and create jobs and opportunities in the future.

That is our position, the position of the Obama administration and the position of the McGuinty government. The Liberals' position is to say something in this House and say something completely different at the other end of the country when they are saying that they do not support the auto sector. It is the same party, incidentally, that says that it wants to raise taxes. That is not acceptable.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 15 months have passed and a much wanted announcement of a fund from budget 2008 has not been touched. Not one penny of the \$250 million automotive innovation fund has actually been invested and worse, during 15 months of a drastically deteriorating auto sector.

Could the Minister of Industry help us understand why his government has for 15 critical months ignored even its own offer to help the auto sector?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is incorrect. Just before September 2008, this government made an announcement that it was working with Ford Canada on precisely the auto innovation fund. We are having continuing discussions with other automakers and those discussions are ongoing.

Two weeks ago I made an announcement about how we are working with the private sector and with academia for research and development in the auto sector. That is the kind of leadership we are showing, rather than raising taxes.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a result of the RCMP using two different records management systems, one for British Columbia and another for the rest of the country, the government is wasting at least \$9 million a year and, in fact, risking the safety of Canadians.

What steps, if any, will the minister take to end this mismanagement and incompetence?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is aware, the province of British Columbia relies, in large part, on the RCMP for local policing. The data system to which he is referring is one that was actually promoted and championed by the Government of British Columbia in order to ensure that it could have a uniform information system so that municipal forces, such as in Vancouver, could integrate and share information with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

It is important for that cross-sharing of information to occur to ensure the most effective combatting of crime, including gang crime, in British Columbia, where it is important that those police forces work together.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is the lamest excuse I have ever heard.

The RCMP is a national force and it can have a national system. The issue is not only that \$9 million a year are being wasted but that the person who blew the whistle on this was shunted aside. He was made persona non grata.

Would the minister undertake to conduct an investigation to determine whether or not Gavin Berube was made persona non grata as a result of actually blowing the whistle on this matter?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the function of the RCMP in most of British Columbia is local policing, which is pursuant to a contract with the Province of British Columbia. British Columbia actually pays 90% of the cost of that policing and the federal government pays 10% to reflect the federal policing share.

Similarly, that is the case with this database. When the province of British Columbia wants it to work effectively in British Columbia for local policing, we need to acknowledge that it makes a bit of sense, which is why we want to see the closest integration to combat crime as effectively as possible in British Columbia for British Columbians.

* * *

● (1445)

JUSTICE

Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week has been declared as National Victims of Crime Awareness Week.

Victims' rights is an issue that is very dear to me and was especially important to my late husband Chuck, who was well-known to many members here today. For years he and I criticized our justice system for focusing too much on the rights of criminals. All too often the victims felt they were victimized a second time by the justice system.

Could the minister advise the House of the significant efforts taken by our government to ensure that the victims of crime have a greater voice within the justice system?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, remember Chuck as a venerable and determined fighter for the cause of victims, a tireless champion, and his early passing was a great loss to his family and to all Canadians.

Oral Questions

Our government believes that for too long the justice system has all but ignored the experience of victims, their concerns and their interests, which is why we have decided to take action to rebalance our justice system to take them into account.

We have taken action on things like establishing an ombudsman for victims. We have included victims in National Parole Board hearings. We have provided video conferencing for their involvement. We are doing other things to provide online services and more. We are taking the side of victims, not criminals.

* * *

CANADIAN FLAG PINS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Canadian Heritage tried to duck responsibility for the fact that his office, during the largest manufacturing meltdown in Canadian history, outsourced the production of Canadian flag pins to China. Rather than taking responsibility for that action, he tried to shift blame to the parliamentary boutique.

I called the parliamentary gift shop and it assured me that, unlike the Department of Canadian Heritage, all its pins are made in Canada.

How can we count on the minister to stand up for Canadian jobs when he cannot even stand up and give a straightforward answer?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did give a straightforward answer about the pins that are sold on Parliament Hill. The contract for the pins that are purchased by the Government of Canada and distributed to members of Parliament went to, wait for it, a Canadian company in Montreal. We are doing our job.

If the hon. member wants to distribute different pins from his office, he is free to use his MP budget and purchase whatever pins he wants.

We will make it crystal clear that this government has always stood up for this country and for our symbols in spite of the noise from the NDP.

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ARTS AND CULTURE

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as if the issue of maple leaf pins is not bad enough, the government's handling of Canada Day activities is also being called into question.

Last year, Quebec received about 85% of the total Canada Day funds while the rest of the country received only 15%.

While funding for activities in Quebec is important, would the government explain why it does not think that Canada Day is important enough to promote in the rest of Canada?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course the member's facts are entirely wrong. It seems that she and the Bloc Québécois got their facts from the exact same inaccurate newspaper.

The reality is that we have increased funding to support Canadian festivals across this country, including Canada Day, to celebrate Canada. The numbers that she is using are entirely wrong.

We are using this money effectively to support festivals and events across this country that support the birthday of this country. We are proud to do that and we are doing it in a way that is more effective than what the Liberals did, as I described, in a report that was done that showed that 79% of the money under the Liberals went to Liberal only ridings.

We are doing our job to ensure that Canada is celebrated and celebrated with honour.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs had not yet read the ruling in the Omar Khadr case when he announced his decision to file an appeal. A few hours later, the department announced that a final decision on appealing the ruling had not yet been taken.

Has someone notified the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the final decision made by his deputy minister?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker Omar Khadr faces very serious charges. A news report showed media footage of Mr. Khadr allegedly building and planting the improvised explosive devices in Afghanistan, the very devices that have taken the lives of dozens of Canadian men and women.

We are contemplating the appeal of this decision and we will be reviewing the court decision.

As the matter is still before the court, we cannot speak any further on that.

• (1450)

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, clearly the government wants to buy time by filing an appeal. That is the only reason it is prolonging the debate.

But beyond procedure, there is a question the government has never answered. We know that Canada is a signatory to the United Nations convention on the protection of child soldiers. Consequently, can the minister give us his definition of a child soldier?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have said on many occasions in the House, and I will repeat it, Omar Khadr faces very serious charges. He is accused of killing Sergeant Christopher Speer, an American medic in Afghanistan, the same country Canadian troops are fighting today.

President Obama has started a process and we will respect his decision by allowing the committee to run its course.

As I said, we are reviewing the court's decision and considering an appeal. I cannot say any more.

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CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the U.S. Homeland Secretary said clearly that 9/11 terrorists came from Canada. Then Friday, former presidential candidate, Senator McCain, defended her, stating “well, some of the 9/11 hijackers did come through Canada”. The public safety minister's response was that he and the secretary had a chuckle over it.

While a former ambassador to the U.S. calls the myth a “viral infection”, while it threatens thousands of jobs and billions in trade, while the secretary continues to say that terrorists come from Canada, the minister has a chuckle. What exactly is so funny?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we chuckle about is the fact that some people are so ill-informed as to perpetuate the myth and some people are so ill-informed and so uninterested in advancing Canada's interests that they continue to want to feed the myth all the time.

That is what the hon. member wants to do, but we prefer a different approach, where we work co-operatively with the Americans, both to educate them, as is the case with Senator McCain, who needs to get a bit of education on the issue, and the 9/11 commission report is a good place for him to look, but also to look at the considerable steps we have taken as a country to secure our borders and to become more secure against terrorism. We have had successes.

We have had two successful prosecutions against terrorists here with Momin Khawaja, with the Toronto 18. We are taking action to make Canada secure.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the actions of the Conservatives have not worked. The secretary continues to say that terrorists come from Canada. It should not take our leader going to Washington to do that government's job.

This is another quote, “We know that Canada is seen as a fast spot...of undesirable people, possibly criminal elements, being able to gain access to our country”. This time it is not a U.S. official. It is the international trade minister, as leader of the Alliance Party, peddling the same myth, using the same misinformation.

Is the reason the Conservatives refuse to act because the Conservative politics of fear fed fuel to the problem we have today?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we are taking action. We work very closely

with our partners, including the Americans, in trying to combat terrorism.

However, I have news for the hon. member. There are real terrorist threats. That is why we just had a prosecution in this very city, the first ever successful prosecution under the Anti-terrorism Act of Momin Khawaja, convicted of assisting and making detonators, in touch with the London bombers.

These threats are real. We have to be vigilant against them and we are being vigilant against them. We will not turn a blind eye against these threats. We will protect Canadians and we will do what is necessary to ensure their safety.

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AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the Military Police Complaints Commission finally released its report on allegations of detainee abuse in Afghanistan in 2006.

The MPCC has found that many of the reforms brought in after the Somali inquiry have not taken hold and that “military police did succumb to perceived pressure from the chain of the command” and “failed to complete mandated [detainee] transfer procedures” and conduct a full investigation.

Will the Minister of National Defence release the sensitive portions of the report and allow all Canadians to see what this independent body has found?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Defence is always pleased to receive these reports and act on the recommendations.

What the member did not reference was that the report concluded the three individuals detained by the Canadian military police in April 2006 were, in fact, treated humanely and it exonerated the Canadian military of any wrongdoing in that regard.

● (1455)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the MPCC was created as an oversight body for the military police and to build confidence in our military justice system. However, the Conservatives have been hostile to its reports and to its independence. Only this week, the Conservative government was in federal court, trying to stop MPCC from holding hearings on whether military police also failed when detainees were knowingly transferred to Afghan police units that torture.

Will the minister stop his attempt to block the public hearings? Why do the Conservatives want to shut them down and what is it that they want to hide?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We have been very co-operative with the MPCC. We have provided thousands of documents for its perusal. The only thing that we take issue with is the jurisdiction, the efforts of this body to reach into an area of jurisdiction that we feel is not correct. That is the only issue. It has nothing to do with disclosure. It has nothing to do with withholding information. The member simply has his facts wrong.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday, this House voted for a bill that aims to put an end to lenient sentences for criminals who exploit children. While all the other political parties voted in favour of the bill, the Bloc, with a single exception, chose fanatical ideology instead and abandoned Canadian children and families.

[English]

This week is National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. Could the Minister of State for Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec please tell the House how this government is helping to raise awareness about victims' issues?

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Ottawa—Orléans for this important question.

Parents, sisters, brothers and friends will all be proud to know that our government is making sure that criminals who commit certain crimes against our children will face minimum prison sentences.

How can the Bloc vote against victims and for criminals? Once again, the Bloc prefers to play political games rather than protect Quebec families.

During this National Victims of Crime Awareness Week, our government is taking action in partnership with our communities to protect our families—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Halifax West.

* * *

[English]

CHALK RIVER NUCLEAR FACILITIES

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, documents obtained under access to information prove that the Prime Minister is unable to rise above petty personal potshots, even when it comes to the health and safety of Canadians. The natural resource minister's own briefing notes clearly showed the Prime Minister inflamed the recent medical isotope crisis for partisan purposes.

Instead of focusing on the problem, instead of doing his job, why did the Prime Minister choose to play politics with public safety? Will he assure us that he will not fire the official who wrote the briefing note?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the member opposite who is playing politics with this. It is clear from his question that he has not read the document to which he has referred.

Members will remember in the midst of medical crisis, this government acted swiftly and decisively. I point out that Parliament voted unanimously in December 2007 to start the reactor. The decision to remove Linda Keen from her position was supported by a federal court judge.

I am surprised by the opposition's attempt to rewrite history.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the current Minister of Revenue rightly justifies 40% of his travel on charter flights by saying that he had to visit remote areas when he was the minister for Canada Economic Development. But the government website gives no justification for the other 60%. There is no reason to believe the minister could not have taken regular commercial flights or his ministerial limousine.

Can the current Minister of State for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec tell us whether he has adopted the same practice as his colleague, the revenue minister, to travel to his riding of Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, a minister of state for economic development has the responsibility to visit all the regions of Quebec, and I am very proud to visit them. Obviously, a number of regions are further from Ottawa or major urban centres, and we are not always able to take commercial flights.

I will keep on proudly visiting all the regions, several of which are represented by parties other than ours. Personally, I feel it is important for our government to be everywhere in the field in Quebec and to support economic development throughout the province.

* * *

● (1500)

[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the government will issue a death sentence to Roohi Tabassum by deporting her to Pakistan. Her ex-husband has promised to kill her if she returns. Her only crime is that, as a hairdresser in Canada, she cut men's hair.

Roohi came to Canada fleeing religious persecution eight years ago. She has filed a refugee claim and a permanent resident application on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, but so far to no avail.

She is begging for her life. Will the minister ensure that Roohi is not deported?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should know that deportations are the responsibility of the Canada Border Services Agency, which simply enforces the rulings made by the IRB or the courts and our civil servants.

I would be happy to review the case as it relates to an apparent application on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. If I receive the file, typically what members of Parliament do is to approach the minister rather than raise the matter on the floor. I cannot discuss the details of case files on the floor of the House of Commons. It would violate the Privacy Act.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 14 the Liberal leader said, “We will have to raise taxes”.

Does the government agree with the Liberal leader when he says, “We will have to raise taxes”, and should Canadians take him at his word?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Words, Mr. Speaker. As an academic, a journalist and author, the Liberal leader has built his entire career on words. Surely he cannot tell us that his words mean nothing. If his words mean nothing, then he means nothing.

His words were, “We will have to raise taxes”. Which taxes would he raise, how much would he raise them and who would have to pay? I invite the leader of the Liberal Party to return to his seat and answer that question right after question period.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 22, the listeriosis investigator informed committee that she had not completed an official interview with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. Yet, according to her calendar, the fact-gathering sessions are now complete.

Has the minister been officially interviewed? If not, has he been scheduled, not for a quiet coffee chat but for an official interview, or is the Prime Minister now willing to admit his so-called investigations purpose is really designed to avoid holding the minister to account?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can just imagine the howling by the member for Malpeque if I were meddling with the independent investigator. That is exactly the nature of independence. She works independently of me or any other department, for that matter. If she calls, I would be happy to sit

down, I would be happy to be interviewed and I would be happy to talk to her at any time.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I request the unanimous consent of the House to table information about allocations to provincial and territorial committees for 2003-09 editions of “Celebrate Canada!”

This document shows that, contrary to what the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages said, I reported not factual inaccuracies, but factual accuracies, and all of the numbers I mentioned were correct.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert have unanimous consent to table this document?

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

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● (1505)

CREE-NASKAPI (OF QUEBEC) ACT

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-28, An Act to amend the Cree-Naskapi (of Quebec) Act.

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

* * *

[Translation]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the reports of the Canadian delegations of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie respecting their participation at the APF Bureau meeting, held in New York on January 21 and 22, 2009, and the meeting of the steering committee of the network of women parliamentarians of the APF, held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, from February 12 to 15, 2009.

Business of the House

[English]

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-370, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (mandatory labelling for genetically modified foods).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a private member's bill that I had introduced in a previous Parliament. It is a bill that was voted down unfortunately when it was introduced by another member during the last Parliament.

It is an important bill so that we can at least have some labelling of genetically modified foods. This is a question that many people are asking these days. The least we can do for the Canadian public is to let them know what they are eating.

My bill calls to amend the Food and Drugs Act to provide this labelling of genetically modified food. It is the least that members and the government can do for the Canadian public.

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

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CUSTOMS ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC) moved that Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Customs Act, be read the first time.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because of the need for good coordination and reliable information on the swine flu situation, the official opposition would like to make a proposal today. Consultations have begun with all of the parties; more may be required. We are flexible about that, but I wonder if there is yet unanimous consent for a motion along the lines of the following.

I move that in order to reinforce the confidence that all Canadians should have in Canada's public health system at this time, when concern is growing in many countries about the risk of a new international influenza outbreak, a special surveillance committee of parliamentarians is hereby established with all the powers given to standing committees by the Standing Orders. It would consist of 11 members of the House of Commons, including five from the Conservative Party, three from the Liberal Party, two from the Bloc Québécois and one from the New Democratic Party, with a chair to be elected from among the government members, for the purpose of monitoring all developments in respect of the influenza situation and ensuring that the public receives the timely, accurate and useful information needed to react appropriately to evolving events. To that end, the parties should select their representatives on this committee at least in part based upon their expertise in public health matters. The committee should receive daily briefings from senior government officials, in camera when necessary, on all matters that it deems to be relevant to protecting and promoting the public interest.

● (1510)

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order on that point. Mr. Speaker, you have been here a lot longer than I have and I think you are well aware that these types of matters are usually discussed between all of the House leaders. The whips are going to have a meeting tomorrow. This is a very serious, non-partisan issue. I would have hoped that we could have discussed this before this motion was brought before the House.

I would further point out to the hon. member that there is a standing committee for health that could and I am sure will be immediately seized with this issue. I do not see the need for this and I certainly do not see the need to play politics with this important, non-partisan issue.

The Speaker: I do not know that we need to get into a debate. We have had a proposal. There is no consent at the moment. The government House leader has suggested that this is a matter that might be raised at the House leaders meetings.

The Speaker, of course, is always glad to see cooperation between all hon. members in the House on various matters, but I do not think this is a matter for debate in the House.

[Translation]

Does the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord want the floor on this point of order?

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move another motion that has nothing to do with the point of order. Shall I do so immediately?

[English]

The Speaker: The hon. House leader of the official opposition has a point of order.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order to reassure the government House leader that the objective today in the proposed motion that the deputy House leader for the opposition just referred to is to assist the government and all Canadians in dealing with a very serious health concern.

We are not in any way endeavouring to be provocative in this matter and I am glad that it will be discussed among House leaders tomorrow. I think that can be useful. All members of the House will have the substance of the motion for some considerable length of time in advance of that meeting to consider it.

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. whip for the Bloc Québécois wishes to move another motion.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is about something else entirely. There has been some discussion among the parties, and I believe that, this time, you will find unanimous consent in the House for the following motion:

Business of the House

That, at the conclusion of tomorrow's debate on the Bloc Québécois' opposition motion, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, April 29, 2009, at 3:00 p.m.; and that the deferred recorded division on the second reading stage of Bill C-241 in the name of the member for Brome—Missisquoi and the deferred recorded division on Motion M-294 in the name of the member for Vaudreuil- Soulanges, currently scheduled immediately before the time provided for private members business on Wednesday, April 29, 2009, be deferred anew following the vote on the Bloc Québécois' opposition motion on the same day.

The Speaker: Does the hon. whip for the Bloc Québécois have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*English*]

The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of constituents who are concerned about the NATO nuclear policy and would like the government to urge a review of this policy since Canada has signed and ratified a treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in which article 6 commits each of the parties to work for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

The petitioners are saying the NATO stated position that nuclear weapons are essential runs counter to this treaty. They call upon the Government of Canada to press publicly for an urgent review of NATO's nuclear weapons policy to ensure that all NATO states fulfill their international obligations under the NPT to negotiate and conclude an agreement for the elimination of nuclear weapons and eliminate reliance on nuclear weapons within NATO's strategic concept.

• (1515)

LIBRARY MATERIALS

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, am pleased to present a petition on my bill, Bill C-322, An Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (library materials), which will protect and support the library book rate and extend it to include audio visual materials.

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 and as certified by the clerk of petitions, I want to present another income trust broken promise petition sent to me by Mr. Brad Grant, who remembers the Prime Minister boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said, "There is no greater fraud than a promise not kept".

The petitioners want to remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts, but he broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over

\$25 billion of the hard-earned retirement savings of over 2 million Canadians, particularly seniors.

The petitioners call upon the government first, to admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions, as was demonstrated at the finance committee hearings; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and finally, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

PESTICIDES

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to table today. One is for more than 200 people from across Alberta, from Vegreville to Pincher Creek, Calgary to Lloydminster, Spruce Grove to Fort Saskatchewan. They are calling on the government to ban non-essential pesticides across Canada. They are concerned with the health impacts of non-essential pesticides.

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is from more than 100 people from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and British Columbia. In this petition, they are calling on the government to not support the Canada-Colombia trade deal.

They are extremely concerned with the violation of human rights, and the violation of environmental and social rights in that country. They say that we should not proceed with such trade agreements until they truly reflect the principles of fair trade, including environment, social justice and human rights.

SRI LANKA

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are understandably very concerned about the war taking place in Sri Lanka. Canadians would like the Conservative government to do something to actually intervene and get the attention of the Sri Lankan government to have a ceasefire.

This petition calls on the Conservative government to do something to help in peaceful negotiations: oppose economic sanctions, withdraw the high commissioner, raise this matter in some manner by ensuring it gets raised at the UN Security Council, and isolate Sri Lanka by having it removed from the Commonwealth of Nations. The petitioners are asking that something be done to get the attention of the Sri Lankan government in order to stop the fighting so that innocent people are no longer losing their lives.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 84 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that Question No. 84 be made an order for return?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Business of Supply

[Text]

Question No. 84—**Mr. Michael Savage:**

With regard to the employment insurance program: (a) what written advice have the departments obtained from and given to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development on (i) reducing the two week waiting period for employment insurance, (ii) reducing or changing qualifying hours to a uniform national standard; and (b) what are the monthly statistical breakdown for waiting periods (times) for processing employment claims for the years 2006, 2007 and 2008?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADA-UNITED STATES BORDER

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to this opposition day motion introduced by my colleague and friend from Ajax—Pickering. I will be splitting my time with the member for Vancouver Centre.

[Translation]

As the member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, I am well aware of the economic reality of trade between our two countries, because we are a three-hour drive from the border with Maine. Every day, thousands of travellers from New Brunswick cross that border.

My riding is the nerve centre of highway traffic in eastern Canada. Nearly all the trucks loaded with goods from Atlantic Canada pass through Moncton on their way to the United States or Quebec. Ninety per cent of our province's exports are headed for the American market, and half of those to New England.

Annual wood pulp production in New Brunswick is estimated at more than \$1.5 billion. Most of this is exported to the United States. Commercial fishing is an important industry in the province. The value of fish and seafood exports reached nearly \$800 million in 2003. Once again, the bulk of these exports went to the United States.

We have major projects getting under way in New Brunswick. For example, the second Irving Oil refinery is a project estimated at \$7 billion. Nearly all of its production will be exported to the United States. The connections between New Brunswick, eastern Canada, the rest of Canada and the American market are very important to us, as Canadians, Maritimers and New Brunswickers.

There are mutual economic benefits to be had, and the way to get those benefits is to open our borders to trade. That holds true for all the provinces in Canada that share a border with the United States.

● (1520)

[English]

The success of our future lies in the lessons of our past. Canada-U.S. relations span two centuries and have not only survived but have grown out of war, external influence, conflict, partnership, protectionism and differing and like-minded opinions. Canada-U.S. relations are key to the success of both nations, both in the past and moving forward in the future.

There is quite a past between Atlantic Canada and northeastern United States.

I want to quote from an historical text that outlines the role of Canadians in establishing a Canadian presence in the United States. It reads:

A study made by the United States Bureau of the Census of data collected in 1910 showed that the percentage of Canadian residents exceeded that of the [Caucasian] population of the United States in the professions, in the upper ranks of labour and the services, and in the servant classes - a range which would include the President of Cornell University, the systematically recruited Canadian-trained nurses all over the United States, the French Canadian from the New England mill town, and the Maritime girl in the Boston basement kitchen.

The Maritime girl in the Boston basement kitchen was my grandmother, Elizabeth Carey Murphy.

Towns like Leominster and Waltham were replete with French Canadian mill workers from Quebec and acadiens et acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick et des maritimes.

We had such strong economic and cultural social relations with the United States. This is no different from any other region. In the western provinces, their relations with the United States to the south were just as strong as they were in Ontario in Quebec and so on.

We have been through much, as countries and as neighbours, and great leaders of the past have been able to build upon the issues that have divided us and nurture the ones that have brought us together.

Not surprisingly, the history of it all starts with John A. Macdonald who, after winning an 1891 election on issues of free trade, said that he was, famously:

A British subject I was born—a British subject I will die. With my utmost effort, with my latest breath, will I oppose the 'veiled treason' which attempts by sordid means and mercenary proffers to lure our people from their allegiance. .

A hundred or so years passed and the rest of the century went by. We became closer as neighbours and as friends, to the point where, in the 1960s, United States president, John F. Kennedy, said, famously:

Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners. And necessity has made us allies. Those whom nature hath so joined together, let no man put asunder.

President Johnson, in 1967, building on those comments, said:

We of the United States consider ourselves blessed. We have much to give thanks for. But the gift of providence we cherish most is that we were given as our neighbors on this wonderful continent the people and the nation of Canada.

Even President Nixon, in 1972, heralded and applauded the unique nature of the Canadian identity when he said:

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It is time for us to recognize...that we have separate identities, that we have significant differences, and that nobody's interests are furthered when these realities are obscured.

This brings us to the modern times where relations between Canada and the United States, certainly having spanned both centuries and marked by a common British colonial heritage and conflicts in the early years of the United States and the eventual development of the great relationship that we have, have developed into a very profound international trade relationship, evidenced first by NAFTA and subsequent agreements that we have entered into.

With such a massive trading relationship, naturally trade disputes are inevitable. We have always worked through these trade disputes because of our history, our commitment and our belief that together we are stronger for all those living in our two great countries.

According to a 2003 study commissioned by the Canadian embassy in the United States, based on 2001 data, Canada-U.S. trade supported 5.2 million U.S. jobs.

● (1525)

If the relationship is important to us, and we know it is, it is vital as well to the United States. Our relationship with the United States is the envy of the world. Need I say more than that President Obama chose to come to Canada on his first international visit after being elected?

This brings us to the point today. The Conservative government, almost in ignorance of all that I have said about the history that binds us, has failed to remember the lessons of history. It has failed to remember that this is not a partisan issue, Democrat-Republican or Conservative-Liberal. Certain presidents have gotten along with certain prime ministers.

[Translation]

And they have done so regardless of their political affiliations.

[English]

The two centuries of relationship-building that could be used to better articulate the importance of Canada to the United States has not been used by the government. It brings us to the predicament we are in. Some comments that have been made by a high-ranking United States official have damaged Canada's image. What will the government do about it?

I have an article that reads:

Where Canada is cautiously edging toward the European "perimeter" approach, the United States is retreating from prudent risk management and toward the largely illusory safety of walls, guns and dogs.

We do not want that to be the case. We want the government to fight for the strong historical ties that we have had and to fight for what is a very strong and nurturing relationship into the future. However, that must be fought for. It is not good enough to say that those were off-the-cuff comments, that we will let them go and that we will go down when they invite us next. It must be stronger and more focused. The government needs to understand that there is an appetite for those kinds of comments in parts of the United States.

Unfortunately, underestimating the popularity of the comments would be a dangerous mistake for Canada. It is one step from trade protectionism to border checks for tourists. What is coming this

summer will be felt in every part of Canada. The government should do something now to improve the image of Canada, which, up until the Conservative government was elected, was very well thought of in the rest of this continent.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about something that I found very distressing and that was the minister's response today in question period. Instead of using the kind of language he was talking about in tackling this head on, we see a return to these politics of fear. The minister said that Canadians needed to be worried and afraid and that this was a real and present threat, and yet we are trying to talk about a trading relationship between Canada and the United States and the fact that we have people in the U.S. administration who are propagating all kinds of myths.

Does it not make it even worse when our own government stands and talks about the reasons that people should be fearful, particularly when the last incident at the Canada-U.S. border was 10 years ago? Canadian officials did their job. They apprehended that individual and the individual faced justice.

● (1530)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am sorry to interrupt the member, but before you leave, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to let you know that there is agreement from all parties that tomorrow, if you would so choose, we have a moment of silence in recognition of the day of mourning for workers injured and killed on the job. I just wanted to let you know that.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member.

The hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe has the floor.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, clearly, the government is out of step here. It has a role in leadership. Heavy is the head that wears the crown. The government should realize that those statements, whether or not they were intended to do harm, did do harm to our image.

As my friend and colleague said, statements like that propagate myths about how the horrible events of and after 9/11 occurred. The government's job is to dissipate those myths and to work on the very strong historical relationship that exists between the two countries. It must quell the nervousness, appetite and budding xenophobia that might be out there in the United States toward its longest and best partner. The government has failed to do this. It seems to think that if it asks questions of the homeland security secretary that somehow it is criticizing the United States. That is not the objective of this motion. By virtue of what I hear from the speakers, all of the parties seem to be in agreement that this is a very well-intentioned motion to get the government to move on rebuilding the image of Canada and build on the strength that exists between our two great countries.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think that the minister and the government basically are covering their tracks for their failure over the last few years to publicize or make more available the NEXUS cards and the pass cards that would make it easier for people to cross the border.

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I would like to know what the member thinks will happen come June 1 when people will be rushing to get passports in such a short order. Does he think that the government should have been on this file earlier? Perhaps it should reduce the cost of a passport, or provide free passports for a 90 day period to get us through this problem, which has partly been created by the government's own inaction.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, clearly the government has not reacted with sufficient resources to allay the problem that exists.

As far as the trucking associations are concerned, the smart cards are working. They had no real commitment on enhanced drivers' licences. Some of the provinces are being left on their own to provide solutions. There is a patchwork quilt of programs across the country involving enhanced drivers' licences. After all, that is the Government of Canada sitting over there. Canada is a country, so why is it that some provincial jurisdictions have instituted enhanced driver's licence programs and others have not? My own province has decided not to. The rationale seems to be that this whole problem would only relate to border crossings on land, that it would not help with respect to air travel, in other words, people who are not driving.

The problem lies with the federal government on the issue of passports and getting them into the hands of people who need them speedily to expedite cross-border travel, whether it be for leisure or for business. I agree with the hon. member that the government has fallen down on the job, and sadly, we will only see the true extent of that this summer.

• (1535)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member has eloquently explained, the motion is about the lack of communication between the Conservative government and the U.S., our largest trading partner.

Because of the integration of economies, it is important to keep this relationship vibrant and alive. According to a Toronto *Star* report today, the U.S. thinks that the weakest flank of the relationship and the one with the most leaks is Canada, and that the flow of people from Canada is three times more suspicious than the flow of people from Mexico.

Former prime ministers Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin moved effectively to create a smart border. I would like the member's opinion on where the Conservative government has moved with the smart border.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, virtually nowhere is the answer.

This is an administrative matter toward which resources could have been applied, and it clearly has not been done.

I would like to address some of the comments that were made by Madam Napolitano. They were more than just about terrorists and 9/11. As my hon. friend has raised in her question, there was a comparison between the United States-Canada border and the United States-Mexico border, and that they should be treated the same. That is not constant with our common history.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to this motion which, if we boil it down to its essentials, talks

very clearly about the fact that the government has failed to maintain an effective relationship with the United States.

We used to be proud to say that we shared the longest unarmed border in the world, and indeed it was. We are well aware that things have changed over time. The new world terrorism has made us more careful, which is as it should be, but building and keeping a mutually beneficial and respectful relationship is an active process. Anyone who is married or has a good friend knows that; anyone who has colleagues knows that one has to keep working at a relationship.

My colleague spoke quite movingly of our historic relationship with the United States. I remember when former U.S. president Bill Clinton was visiting, Mr. Chrétien stood in the House and said quite jokingly, "You know we are best friends, we are neighbours and we are allies, but we are not lovers. We do not get into bed together". Mr. Clinton thought that was funny. Essentially that is what our relationship is about. It is a mutually respectful relationship.

We have trusted each other in the past and maybe we have not gotten along so well at other times. We all know that relationships were stressful between Canada and the United States when Canada did not go to war in Iraq. We smoothed that out. Mr. Chrétien was prime minister at the time. He maintained solid relationships and continued to build on them.

Those who are as long in the tooth as I am will remember the days when, flowing from every street and large building in the United States were banners with the message, "We love Canada", because Canada had protected some Americans for three months in the Canadian embassy in Tehran, Iran.

We have a history of close relations and strained relations. The point is there needs to be an active process in which we can maintain relationships and deal with the things we do not agree on.

The Conservative government has a tendency to sit passively, not merely with the relationship with the United States but with everything. Whether it is an economic crisis or a recession, the government likes to sit passively and wait and see what happens. When the house of cards falls down or when things get really bad, there is a huge panic and suddenly there is activity, but quite often it is too little too late.

We have had a very long relationship with the United States. Eighty per cent of our trade is done with the U.S. When we talk about borders, we talk about the smart border initiative that was brought in by Mr. Chrétien and strengthened by Mr. Martin, which the current government has failed to keep going. The smart border initiative recognized a few things. It actually survived 9/11. It brought about the NEXUS pass and quick passes. It also recognized that a porous border brings in good and bad.

We were very quick to deal with 9/11 and work with homeland security on a mutual basis. We worked together. Whenever congressmen or senators stood and said that all the 9/11 terrorists came from Canada, the Canadian government was quick to say that the facts did not actually prove that and, indeed, many of those people came from the United States. We have always been quick to ensure that misunderstandings do not occur.

When we say the government has failed, we talk about it failing to maintain the smart border initiative, but we also talk about it failing to maintain the western hemisphere travel initiative. The 2010 Olympics will be occurring soon. This is an important initiative. People are going to be coming across border, hopefully, to the 2010 Olympics and they are going to have problems because the government has failed to make sure that the western hemisphere travel initiative is maintained.

We saw the passport debacle in 2006. People were waiting in lineups that were 6 to 10 blocks long to get passports. One would have thought the government would have learned from that mistake and would have hastened to take steps to make sure that Canadians had easy access to passports. This has not happened. When there is a run on passports again, there is going to be the same problem all over again.

• (1540)

We talked about the failed ability to make a case of the thickening of the border for security also stops the movement of goods, trade, families and business. In my part of the world, British Columbia, there is an initiative that involves Alaska and the states along the Pacific coast all the way down to California. It is called Cascadia. The Pacific coast states have kept in touch with Canadian provinces. We have built a strong relationship. We know that Canada and U.S. trade interests are strong and the border needs to facilitate that.

We can look at the auto crisis and the country of origin labelling, the COOL legislation, the international trafficking in arms legislation. Canada cannot bid for aerospace industries any more because the government has failed to stand up for Canadian interests when it comes to relations with the U.S.

I have talked about the fact that only 30% of Americans have passports. When the western hemisphere travel initiative, WHTI, comes forward, many people will not be able to cross the border. It is not only trade and business. It is not only about security. When it comes to public health, I do not know how we can tell mosquitoes or viruses such as west Nile, SARS and the swine flu that they must recognize the border. Viruses cross borders. Insects cross borders. We need to talk about how to share strong public health information. We need to deal effectively and cooperatively when things such as the swine flu and SARS occur.

There is no strategy. There is no plan. There is no active working to stop bad rumours, to build strong relationships where important and to enable a secure and porous border.

I am really disappointed in the government. We thought it would have had a very good relationship with the U.S. We thought it would have understood especially since so many members of the government come from the west where there are very strong relationships with the U.S. The government should have taken the steps necessary to maintain that relationship in an appropriate manner and to work hard on it.

We only have to look at tourism and the drop in the number of United States tourists coming to Canada. One could argue that the dollar was a problem a long time ago, but we now have a real problem. Every single day 300,000 people cross the border. Over \$1.6 billion in trade occurs every single day and 70% of that trade

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involves trucks going back and forth across the border. Our exports have dropped very much since February of last year. Tourism is falling month after month, year after year. We have to be concerned. It is not merely the dollar. The border has to be one in which people are able to cross.

The border is not just about tourism, not just about business, not just about public health, not just about trade. Families cross the border regularly to visit with each other. Many of us have children who are living in the U.S. Many people from the United States have family living here. There is a human relationship.

The government has failed to keep that relationship strong and alive and to take the steps necessary to make any relationship work. It is not only on this issue. This is just another example of the government's failure to take active steps, to have a plan, to have a strategy, to do what it must to prevent problems from arising. The government has been asleep at the switch. The government's passivity is extraordinary. I can name the things in which this passivity has occurred. The softwood lumber deal is one of them and Omar Khadr is another one. The government sat around and waited. I do not know what else to call it but incompetence, a lack of ability to look forward, to recognize that it has to stand up for Canada, which the Conservatives said they were going to do when they ran in the election in 2006. They said, "We stand up for Canada".

• (1545)

Standing up for Canada means standing up for a relationship with the U.S., our strongest trading partner, and standing up when people say that Canada is a terrorist hotbed and that it is not as safe to come from Canada as it is from Mexico, where illegal migrants cross that border every day.

There are some facts that we need to tell the new administration, which may not understand the strong relationship. It is the government's duty to do that, and it is not doing it. I chalk up one more failure of the government to have any plan, to do any strategic thinking and to act in any way, shape or form.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member has just made some very important points about the government and its inaction over the last number of years.

I believe 600 miles of fence has already been built at the U.S.-Mexico border. Drones are flying in the sky there. If we do not watch out, we will have the same sort of applications apply to our border as that applied at the Mexico-U.S. border. The government has to get more active in opposing this kind of action.

Recently drones have been flying over the Manitoba border with North Dakota. One of the Conservative members of the legislature made that an issue. We need more action like that, not less.

I would like to echo what the member said and applaud her for making those statements. Does she have any other observations that she would like to make at this time regarding the inaction of the Conservative government on this file?

Business of Supply

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, there were some other things which I did not even get to talk about. We share a freshwater treaty with the U.S., where our rivers run south from our mountains here. We share certain waterways, the Niagara waterway is an example. We share the Columbia River Treaty with the U.S. We share a lot with our neighbours.

It will be difficult and dangerous for all of us in Canada if we break this relationship. It will be harmful for jobs. It will work against people with families or friends moving across the border.

The point is the government, when asked a question in the House, cannot just stand up and say that it captured the first-ever terrorist. That continues to say that we have so many terrorists here that we must keep looking for them because Canada is an unsafe country.

We are friends and allies with the United States. We are not an unsafe country. We are working together to make this thing work. It would be a pity if we saw barbed wire along the borders, as people have in Mexico.

• (1550)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the member comment specifically on the issue of the Olympics? I am deeply concerned about this.

In June all U.S. citizens will need a passport, and less than 30% of Americans have one. Most of them are unaware that this requirement will be in place.

I have talked with U.S. legislators and governors, including Governor Gregoire. I have raised the idea that we need them to push this requirement off until after the Olympics. They are amazed that this issue has not been raised by the Canadian government, that this argument has been put off. They share the concern that we will have an absolute mess when Americans try to come up and enjoy the Olympics but get turned away because of the Conservative government's refusal to act and stand up for Canadians.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, if the government was thinking strategically, it would have postponed this for a year until after the Olympics and deal with it then. The only person speaking out on this issue is Congresswoman Slaughter, and she is speaking out loudly. She says that we have to deal with this issue and move forward.

My hon. colleague's question was well put. I hope the United States might be a little more efficient at issuing passports to people who want to come across the border in 2010 than our government has been. I hope it will take less than a year and a half to get that thing going.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that the NDP have asked for the development and implementation of a national tourism strategy, which would contain several elements.

We have looked at extending the passport expiry time from five years to ten years, increasing accessibility to passports and photos by making them available through licence bureaus and other government locations and reducing the price to obtain a passport to make it more cost effective, such as free passports for people under the age of 18, free passports to veterans and half price passports to seniors. I have even suggested that the government might want to have a 90

day moratorium on charging and maybe have free passports for everyone as of—

The Deputy Speaker: I will have to stop the hon. member there to allow time for the hon. member for Vancouver Centre, who only has about 15 to 20 seconds.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, we all discussed this issue when we had the big debacle on passports in 2006, when people could not get passports. People were concerned and worried because they could not even make travel arrangements to go to funerals or weddings.

The member's suggestions are all ones that we can agree with and I think they should be implemented. They could have been implemented in—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for St. Catharines.

There is no doubt that Canada-U.S. trade is an engine of economic growth and job creation. We share one of the world's largest and most comprehensive trading relationships, which supports millions of jobs in each country, and the numbers are impressive.

Two-way trade in goods across the Canada-U.S. border crosses at the rate of \$1.9 billion a day, well over \$1 million a minute. We are each other's most important partner in economic growth. Canada is the biggest export market for U.S. products, more than China, Japan, the United Kingdom and Germany combined.

To put it another way, Canada buys four times more from the United States than China buys from it. In fact, Canada is a larger market for U.S. goods than all 27 countries of the European Union combined, which has more than 15 times the population of Canada. One in 25 American jobs depends on free and open trade with Canada.

Sometimes it is difficult for people in the street to understand that trade both ways creates American jobs, both exporting and importing, both goods and services, but it is very true.

Through our embassy in Washington, D.C. and our network of consulates general located throughout the United States, representatives of Canada are emphasizing these facts in meetings with their American counterparts, whether in discussions with government officials, speeches to the business community or in meetings with the media.

Furthermore, ministers of this government have met with administration officials and legislators to regularly discuss our overlapping economies, including issues ranging from the efficient crossing of the border, to labelling regulations, to the crisis facing the North American auto industry and our common response. In fact, the Minister of International Trade is in Washington this very day to meet with the U.S. trade representative and engage on these issues of great economic importance to Canadians.

Business of Supply

Since the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement was signed in 1988 and then NAFTA in 1992, there is no doubt that our bilateral trade has been a major driver of economic growth on both sides of the border. Over the last two decades, Canada-U.S. trade has tripled. Investment flows have also increased substantially.

Given the scale of this success, it is clear that the path to continued economic growth for our two countries lies in our North American supply chains. Supply chains are highly integrated international networks through which components or services are acquired, transformed and delivered to customers rather than within one country.

Our North American competitive position in the global marketplace relies on the strength and efficiency of our cross border supply chains.

Our trade does not mean that the U.S. drops container loads of finished products on Canadian shores and vice versa. The essence of our supply chains is that we make things together, thereby improving the competitiveness of the final product through lower cost, better technology or better design. Much more of our trade is buying and selling within North American supply chains than it is in finished goods headed for the retail shelves.

As trade has expanded freely across the border, more and more industries, companies and their suppliers are operating on both sides. Assembling the parts of a single finished car for example involves multiple border crossings in various stages of manufacturing.

Today about one-third of Canada-U.S. trade occurs between branches of the same corporations and a similar amount for trade within supply chains. Thousands of Canadian and American companies are taking advantage of opportunities on both sides of the border to improve the value of their products to make them more competitive.

From what I have just described, it follows that a smart, efficient and secure border is essential for our highly integrated industries. Yet the Canada-U.S. border is a challenge for both of us and why the United States cannot ignore it any more than we can.

It is the efficiency of North American supply chains that allows our businesses to compete more effectively with Asia and Europe and spurs innovation in our workforce. Conversely, inefficiencies in the supply chains translate into decreased competitiveness for North American companies. Therefore, a border problem is not just a Canadian problem; it is also a U.S. problem

• (1555)

On average, more than 300,000 people a day travel across the border, and \$1.9 billion in goods every day. In the nearly eight years since 9/11, both countries have invested heavily in border security for all the right reasons. Both Canada and the United States need to work to ensure that our shared border is a true gateway to our prosperity, not a cumbersome checkpoint that stifles our competitiveness.

What do I mean by that? We do not need more thickening of the border. Thus our government is committed to ensuring that security protects our supply chains and impacts two-way trade as little as possible. Our competitive edge in the global marketplace depends

upon it. As the new administration in Washington moves forward on a new direction in government, we remain confident that there will be good collaboration between our two countries during this critical period.

As members know, the temptation is great around the world to turn inward, close doors to global co-operation and become protectionist. We have been taking every opportunity to remind our trading partners, including the U.S., that this is not the approach to take. As the Great Depression showed us, protectionism feeds upon itself, spawning retaliation after retaliation, and can quickly spiral out of control.

We need to think in the long-term and harness the opportunities inherent in international trade and investment to not only ride through the storm, but to come out on the other side stronger, more competitive and more co-operative than ever before. Canada's message of co-operation is certainly needed these days and it is one we continue to emphasize with the United States.

If we could point to a classic example of a trade relationship that has worked for Canada, it would no doubt be our relationship with the United States. Our economies have grown together. Our communities have thrived together. It is safe to say that in some ways, we pioneered the notion of global value chains and we have created a model of co-operation by working through some very thorny issues such as softwood lumber.

With such close economic ties and such a deeply integrated industrial base, it is clear that our economies will succeed together or fail together during this challenging time. That is why we would be deeply concerned with any proposed U.S. measures that may limit the ability of Canadian exporters to access this key market. A recent example of this would be our response to U.S. stimulus efforts that would limit foreign suppliers to new infrastructure projects. We are monitoring the situation very closely and not standing idle. Our government and Canadian officials are closely engaged with their U.S. counterparts on this issue.

We have also shared Canada's concerns with other nations around the world that trade with the United States. Our embassy in Washington is working closely with U.S. Senate and congressional leaders to ensure that the U.S., like all other nations, lives up to its international trade obligations of open and fair trade.

As MP for the border riding of Sarnia—Lambton, I have met with my American congressional counterparts to discuss the issue of border thickening. Dialogue on this urgent issue exists at every level between the American and Canadian government.

It is clear that American jobs and American communities rely upon Canadian inputs, Canadian know-how and Canadian investment. Canada is a valued and long-standing customer of American goods and services as well. Our economies need one another. It is clear that Canada must be part of American efforts to get their economy up and running again, to help both of our economies move through this crisis.

Business of Supply

As a government, we are committed to underscoring this message at every opportunity. Globally, we think Canada is in a good position to deliver this kind of co-operative message. We have always been a trading nation. Whether it is at the WTO where we continue to push for a successful conclusion to the Doha round or through an extremely successful North American Free Trade Agreement, collaboration, co-operation and good will are the hallmarks of our bilateral relationship.

•(1600)

Our two countries have built broad and deep foundations through 350 agreements and treaties that cement our mutual co-operation. This Conservative government will continue to work closely with the United States to ensure that the border is not an obstacle to our continued prosperity but a gateway to further growth.

The Deputy Speaker: Before moving on to questions and comments, 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 Vancouver Centre, Justice; the hon. member for St. John's East, Correctional Service of Canada; and the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer, the Forestry Industry.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree that the trading relationship between Canada and the United States is absolutely essential. It is one of the reasons I am so concerned about so much of the misinformation that is coming out of the United States, where Secretary Napolitano is calling for “a real border”, saying that the informality between our countries is over and we should expect a very different approach to the border.

She has also said,

to the extent that terrorists have come into our country or suspected or known terrorists have entered our country across a border, it's been across the Canadian border.

The U.S. ambassador's response is to say that this myth is pervasive and a huge problem. The response of the former ambassador is to say that this is a “viral infection”. Yet the response of the government, quoting the public safety minister, was:

I don't believe that there's an effort to change the level of security at the Canadian border.

How can we fix this problem if the government will not even acknowledge that the problem exists, when U.S. officials are so obviously misinformed? We heard former presidential candidate Senator McCain back up and say that, yes, there were 9/11 terrorists who came from the United States. This refrain is repeated again and again, and all we hear in the House is not to worry, there was some minor correction.

Why does the government refuse to tackle this issue?

•(1605)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, I certainly think we need to address some of the myths that are out there. There is no question about that. Certainly the myth is that the northern and southern U.S. borders are the same. That is a myth. The reality is that they are not. The Canada-U.S. international boundary is the longest shared border

between any two countries in the world. We have talked about that today.

We have also talked about the historic and vital relationships we have had and how this has brought business people, families, trade and all the other good things, the first responders, all the different tourism efforts, and so on, historically that we have enjoyed. That is why this government is certainly endeavouring and engaged in open dialogue and sincere practices to continue and better these relationships.

We have heard of differences that we know are myths, and we are correcting those myths as we go along.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in June 2008, 14-year-old students from Chief Peguis Junior High School took a bus trip to the Hershey games, a track and field competition in North Dakota that they go to on a regular basis each year. They sent the required information to the border 48 hours before the trip, yet when the bus got to the border, one of the so-called precleared students was taken off the bus, fingerprinted and sent back to Canada.

The U.S. consulate has since apologized for this, but I took the matter to the Midwestern Legislative Conference in Rapid City, South Dakota, last July and was successful in getting unanimous approval on a resolution sent to the Prime Minister, George Bush and other affected politicians.

I would ask the government, will it report back to the House on what has been done so far to develop consistent rules on student and senior bus tours going across the border?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, I think we could all cite specific incidents on many issues, border security and border crossings being one of very many. We could all relate an incident that has happened to somebody in our riding.

Living in a border community, that is one of the things I hear. I hear issues about people trying to get into Canada or the United States. Those issues are dealt with, and dealt with properly. They are dealt with by the officials who are responsible for them.

I meet regularly with my counterpart in Michigan. We deal with these issues, we deal with the people responsible for making those decisions, and those issues will continue to be dealt with.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for so clearly sharing the importance of our trade relationships back and forth.

I would like to ask her this as someone who is responsible for a city on the border. We had heard earlier in the House that perhaps there are issues with how fast the passports are being processed, and so on.

Could the member share some knowledge she might have on whether this is actually a real issue?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, right now the passports are being issued in a very timely fashion. They have been for quite some time. I believe people can access a passport in less than three weeks. That is thanks to our government and the extra people it has put on board to do that.

Business of Supply

• (1610)

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak. I certainly want to congratulate the member for Sarnia—Lambton, who did an outstanding job on behalf of our government in describing exactly what the state of affairs is today, not anything around speculation, not anything around innuendo, but based solely on facts. That is how she works in her riding, and that is how she proves to be an effective member of Parliament here in Ottawa.

I certainly appreciate the opportunity to respond to motion from the member for Ajax—Pickering. I would like to comment on the degree to which the Canada Border Services Agency has implemented programs to improve border security and to expedite the flow of people and goods.

As other speakers have noted, the CBSA manages the border access of people and goods to defend Canada's sovereignty, security, health and prosperity. The border plays a dual role of assistance and security. In other words, efficient borders support immigration, trade and tourism; and smart and secure borders keep criminals and other dangerous elements out of our country. The challenge is to find the appropriate balance of border enforcement in a shifting and dynamic global environment.

The programs implemented or planned at the border reveal several strategies: First, they obtain advance information to permit risk assessment; second, they stream the low risk people and goods to allow border services officers to focus on higher risks; and third, they use technology to better identify people and examine goods.

Improvements to border programs are ongoing. In fact, the House has just received Bill S-2, passed through the Senate, that seeks to amend the provisions of the Customs Act to further support the government's strategy to strengthen security and emphasize and facilitate trade.

In the bill, two key amendments are being proposed that fully implement two programs: first, the advance commercial information initiative; and second, the customs controlled areas.

In 2004 and 2006, the CBSA implemented the advance commercial information initiative in the marine and air modes of transportation, requiring carriers to provide electronic information on cargo destined to Canada within advanced timeframes. In 2007, the CBSA commenced development of eManifest, the third phase of the advance commercial information initiative.

Amendments are being requested to the act to require that advance information be provided electronically and in advance by all participants or links in the trade chain. Requirements already faced by the marine and air modes of transportation will be extended to highway and rail carriers, freight forwarders and importers, allowing the CBSA to rigorously risk assess all cargo prior to its arrival at Canada's borders and minimizing the processing required upon arrival.

Bill S-2 also firms up requirements for the advance passenger information/passenger name record program, which allows for the pre-arrival risk assessment of traveller data that is transmitted by commercial air carriers.

The amendments will also provide border services officers the flexibility to examine persons and goods within the designated customs controlled areas, where most internal conspiracies occur. This will allow for a greater focus on areas of risk and of persons of interest. It will help improve the security of Canadians by enhancing the CBSA's ability to confiscate contraband and other illegal items on docks, airport tarmacs and rail yards before they reach the streets of all our communities.

Let me briefly outline other initiatives that have been undertaken to modernize border management and produce a safe, secure and accessible border.

The NEXUS program is a joint initiative of the CBSA and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. This initiative is designed to expedite the border clearance process for pre-approved, low risk travellers into Canada and the United States. NEXUS followed on the CANPASS programs, domestic initiatives that were similarly designed to streamline and expedite the border clearance process for pre-approved, low risk travellers into our country.

NEXUS continues to be a great example of what can be achieved, working with the U.S., to more efficiently process low risk travellers, allowing more focus on higher or unknown risk people.

NEXUS has now been implemented at all major Canadian airports and harmonized across the air, land and marine modes.

• (1615)

The CBSA's use of iris recognition technology and the NEXUS air system is on the leading edge. Members simply step up to a small kiosk where an innovative iris recognition tool can verify the traveller's identity based on 266 characteristics.

The CBSA is also developing biometric technologies, which are options to further assist our officers in verifying traveller identification through the capture of fingerprints and electronic photos.

The agency is looking at the use of biometric data capture for temporary resident visitors, students, and foreign workers requiring visas, to assist officers in the process of verification of traveller identification.

Fingerprints and photo data will be captured overseas at the time of the visa application. This biodata will be used to verify previous infractions against the applicant to assist in the application's approval or denial process. It will also be used at the time of actual applicant entry into Canada to confirm the visitor's identity to that of their actual visa.

Business of Supply

Continuing this type of innovation, later this year CBSA will introduce new self-serve border kiosks at the Vancouver International Airport. These kiosks will pilot automated border clearance, a new, secure and innovative service designed to accelerate passenger screening and border processing.

A similar need, served by NEXUS for travellers, existed in the trade realm. With more than \$700 billion in goods crossing the border every year, finding innovative ways to identify and efficiently facilitate low-risk goods is vital to Canada's prosperity and our economic competitiveness.

The customs self-assessment program accounts for approximately 20% of the national value for duty of imports and allows importers to use their own business systems and processes to trigger trade data and revenue reporting, saving them both time and money.

The free and secure trade program, or FAST, is similar to customs self-assessment but is the result of the smart border declaration between Canada and the United States. Under the free and secure trade program, both countries cooperated to simplify border crossing for pre-approved low-risk importers, highway carriers and commercial drivers.

Special attention is being placed on marine port security. The harmonized risk scoring and advanced trade data initiative is enhancing the CBSA's ability to identify risk within the marine commercial supply chain by developing brand new risk assessment tools.

The CBSA is harmonizing these requirements with U.S. customs and border protection to create increased border security without imposing competing sets of requirements on the North American trade community. We want security, but we want trade. We want a strong economy and we want to be able to continue to develop those with our partners in the United States.

The CBSA has invested significantly in detection technologies to meet the demands of securing Canada's border. Effective, non-intrusive inspection technology includes the application and development of mass spectrometry and other techniques to identify trace amounts of narcotics and explosives, density metres that discover hidden walls, counterfeit detection equipment, and remote-operated vehicles to inspect ships' hulls.

The mobile vehicle and cargo inspection system, a truck-mounted gamma ray scanning system that scans marine containers, rail cars or trucks quickly and safely, helps officers to detect hidden compartments, contraband, weapons and other potentially dangerous goods. We have one at our borders in the Greater Niagara area, both in Buffalo and it can be transferred from the Peace Bridge to the Rainbow Bridge, providing very effective use.

The Canadian government has stressed its support for these objectives underlying the U.S. western hemisphere travel initiative. The CBSA has been part of the overall federal effort on the WHTI file to ensure Canadians are well informed and prepared for new requirements, and that the WHTI is implemented as smoothly as possible. The government has also been supportive of provincial efforts to develop WHTI compliant enhanced driver's licences in our country.

• (1620)

In summary, the CBSA is a world leader in applying innovative solutions that assist in both improving border security and facilitating the flow of goods. We are good partners with our friends in the United States.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we do not contest that the CBSA is a good organization or that it has a series of initiatives. I want to compliment the parliamentary secretary for recognizing the NEXUS program, the CANPASS program, the biometrics, and the smart border. These are all Liberal initiatives when I had the good fortune to be in cabinet. I am glad that he thought that they were good enough that the government has not improved on them.

The member from this side, for Ajax—Pickering, in his motion is looking for what else is the government doing? How is it accomplishing a package that tells everyone that Canadians are not only good friends, as the member says, they are not only great businessmen, as the member says, but they are also reliable individuals who share a common border?

What is it that the government is doing? How is it accomplishing that? That is what the motion says. The government has not addressed this issue and so continually to repeat that the initiatives that the last Liberal government put in place are great and fabulous things, all that he can be doing is asking for us to applaud ourselves.

We are a little more humble than that. We want to make greater progress. How is the parliamentary secretary going to demonstrate that the Government of Canada is now being proactive? It certainly cannot do that, from what he said.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the member for Eglinton—Lawrence and I appreciate his question, although I find it strangely ironic that he spent the first half of his question complimenting the Liberals. I suppose never let it go past a good Liberal to be able to pat himself on the back for alleged work that they have done. In fact, he spent the first half of his question complimenting his former government for the work that it had done and the second half saying that the only thing the government does is pat itself on the back for the work it does.

It is strangely an ironic question. Nonetheless, a point that should be made is that this government is continually, whether it be through the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of International Trade, the Minister of Public Safety, or the Prime Minister, taking actions. In fact, the Minister of Public Safety was just in Washington and met with his counterpart there. He spoke about the importance of a close relationship and building on the goodwill developed by the Prime Minister and the President. They established a formal process of having twice a year high level meetings between the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Minister of Public Safety, just to name a few. They are off, they are running, and we are working.

Business of Supply

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to review a little history after the comments that were made by the member opposite, particularly a little earlier when he was talking about building relationships. I would like to get the member's comment on it.

It would seem that in the last few years we have had to rebuild a relationship with the U.S. government. It was the past government, the Liberal Party, that actually got into the personal attacks on the U.S. administration that actually put it where we could not move forward on anything that was of substantial concern. It would seem now that we have spent an incredible amount of time, not only with the former administration but particularly with the new administration of the U.S. government, to build a formidable working relationship.

I would like to ask my colleague if he could expand just a little about how important that is. How important is it that we continue to build this relationship, so that we can move forward on border security and trade issues?

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Speaker, the question by the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex is an excellent question and probably the best question we have heard on this topic in the House.

I want to comment on the fact that I too listened to the statements and the motion by the member for Ajax—Pickering. As the member for St. Catharines I certainly disagree and I know the member Lambton—Kent—Middlesex certainly disagrees, but there are some points that he raises in his question.

Let me surmise very quickly, in this time of economic upheaval across our world, not just within North America but certainly within the G7 and within the G20, there is no better partnership and no better friendship and no better time to work with the United States than now. We have done that aggressively over the past three years and few months that we have been in power. We will continue to do so.

• (1625)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to have the pleasure of sharing my time with the member for Don Valley West.

A moment or two ago we listened to some interventions by government members who talked about the relative importance of the relationship that Canada has with its southern neighbour, the United States. No one wants to contest that. What my colleague from Ajax—Pickering is saying in his motion to all Canadians, and I would ask government members to read it carefully, is that it is not important enough for us to look in the mirror and say are we not a great partner in this beautiful relationship, but rather what are we doing to let the other member of that partnership understand the importance of that relationship?

At a time when we are both interdependent, and I noted that the member for Sarnia—Lambton also pointed to the fact that one out of every four jobs, 25%, in the United States are dependent on the relationship that Canada and the United States have developed over the years. They must be aware of the commercial impact of this partnership. What are the Conservatives doing to let the other side understand the importance of a relationship to them and hence from

that, what are the political decisions that the Americans are making to enhance that partnership?

My colleague from Ajax—Pickering essentially was calling on all Canadians to think in terms of the four themes that need to be addressed. If we are going to be talking about enhancing and nurturing this relationship, no one wants to contest that it is important. Yes, we trade more with the United States and yes, the United States trades more with us than we do with every other nation in the world. Yes, we are a much more important partner to the United States from a commercial point of view than all 27 EU member states, but are the Americans aware of the significance of that? And what are they doing to enhance and nurture that relationship? Because no relationship is worth having unless it is worth nurturing. People have to work at being friends, at being partners, at being business associates, otherwise that partnership, that friendship, that political association collapses. It does not matter what we think of ourselves, unless we engage the other side, it does not work.

I was glad that the parliamentary secretary who just spoke gave us an opportunity to talk about the relationship that has been allowed to go more and more fallow. When we were in government not that long ago, 88% of our international trade went immediately south of the border. That does not make us a trading nation but it does indicate that we are an integral part of the dynamics of this continental economy. We were working toward enhancing the percentage that would go further abroad. Now today, the partnership has a much smaller percentage of our overall trade. Unfortunately, the total quantity of that trade has also diminished.

I said I wanted to talk on all four issues. One of them is the commercial one that seems to be going further and further into the red. We need to take a look at the dynamic that is most important for us and build a relationship with the political elements in the United States as well as the entrepreneurial elements that indicate that they can have the relationship that we need here in North America. We need it in our base.

The government acknowledges the fact that there are about 300,000 people who cross the border every day. They are not Canadians; they are Americans as well. So there are about 150,000 people who actually make a trip across the border on a daily basis. That shows the interconnectedness of our commercial affairs. That does not include all of those people who are driving or having access through other means of transportation, be it commercial or personal.

• (1630)

With more of our industries making the investment decision to move south because of the perception that the Americans are no longer as comfortable about the relationship or that partnership, then we are losing investment decisions to go down south. We need just take a look at the problems associated with the auto industry, and some of my colleagues opposite understand that. They might say this is cyclical, but all the associated supply chain industries, whether they are making similar decisions, are making generational decisions. They are not going to happen again in our country for quite some time.

Business of Supply

What is the government doing? Is it taking any proactive steps to ensure a reverse of this trend? Today's motion talks to that. It does not talk about being important. Today's motion talks about how to maintain and grow those imports. How do we make the Americans understand where we are?

Members have talked about the fact that the Olympics will be held in Vancouver in 2010. The Americans will want to come here. They have a habit of moving around without the problems associated with the documentation that the rest of the world takes for granted. Fifty-three per cent of Canadians are accustomed to carrying a passport, but not the Americans. The percentage is a lot less. The member opposite contests that number, but that is okay because it is still vastly superior to the American number.

Here is the importance of that, and my colleague from Essex would know this more than others. It means that the Americans will be tougher on their own citizens as they try to re-enter the United States without the appropriate documentation.

It is okay for Canadians to accept Americans coming across the border. We are probably a little less punctilious about recognizing that somebody may be coming from Detroit to work in Windsor. When that individual goes back to Detroit, he or she will face an examination for their passport credentials. We need to address that.

One of the ways to do it is to build a political relationship with political leaders on the other side. We need to ask where this madness will lead our commercial partnership. Where is the madness for detail that does not appear to be as necessary as fearmongers would suggest? Where is the madness going to lead our relationship?

I said earlier that the previous government took steps with CANPASS and NEXUS and the biometrics on improving and enhancing CBSA supervision at the border. The Liberal government increased border expenditures so those borders would not only be smart borders, but they would be effective borders, and most important, from a commercial point of view, they would be efficient borders. They would move traffic back and forth very quickly. That means an investment has to be made not only in people but in technology. We did that, and I am glad that the government is following on that.

However, in my view, the government has stopped that trend.

As recently as 2002, the Liberal government, a government of which I was a happy participant, had 14 trade and consular offices in the United States. We decided we needed to expand that number well beyond 14. Members must keep in mind that the Mexicans have 45 such offices in the United States and they are not nearly as close in the partnership as we are. We had 14 and we upped that number to 21. What has the current government done since? Zero. In other words, the government has abandoned that political relationship. It abandoned a political relationship on a macro basis, government to government, but it did it as well on a personal basis.

Government members have pointed to the relationship with Louise Slaughter, a member of Congress from upstate New York. I have met her as have other members of Parliament. She is the one spokesperson who says that the relationship the U.S. has with Canada is important. She is the only one who says our relationship is better than the ones the European states have with each other, where

they value freedom of mobility of people and freedom of mobility of goods. It is on the basis of that free movement of people and goods that the European Union is growing not only commercially, but also culturally.

In Canada we are not building that relationship with the Louise Slaughters of the United States Congress. In fact, forget about Janet Napolitano. What is worse, and this is a real shame, John McCain, a close friend of the Conservatives and the republicans on that side of the House, has now decried the U.S. relationship with Canada. This tells us the government is doing zip.

• (1635)

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the interesting rant from the Liberal member opposite. He must remember his own sordid Liberal past when it comes to the relationship with the United States. This madness, as he calls it, originated because his government, when in power, was asleep at the switch when the legislation slipped through on real ID. It called for this type of requirement for our passport and ID to get into the United States. Where were the Liberals? Not only that, but when they had the chance, they had a very weak response to the issue.

Our government, led by the Prime Minister and the current Minister of Trade when he was the public safety minister, in conjunction with his U.S. colleagues on the other side, won the delay in the implementation of the western hemisphere travel initiative and the requirement as well that enhanced drivers' licences could be a viable option for Canadians, or for Americans, jurisdictions that wanted to take this up with respect to complying with the western hemisphere travel initiative. The Liberals were asleep at the switch on that.

I could go further. There are a number of areas. The Liberals were calling Americans idiots, stomping on the George Bush doll. That was his colleague. I could go on and on about how they damaged the relationship with the United States. We are the ones who are acting in the interests of Canadians.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I am so delighted that the hon. member opposite wants to be singular in North America in associating himself with the previous American administration.

This debate was not generated by my colleague from Ajax—Pickering because we wanted to engage in invective. We wanted to put this entire relationship on an important debating principle associated with facts and the consequences of the way those facts were dealt with for the public. Politics really should be about that.

I think many would probably agree with me that when my colleague suggests the previous government might not have done what was required, he probably ignores the fact we went from 14 to 21 consular offices and embassies. We put in place those issues to address the security concerns of the United States.

In fact, we made a commitment to spend the kind of moneys, which the Conservatives are now spending, to secure the northern border so we could move away from these misguided, suspicious initiatives by some members of the American administration.

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Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives seem to believe the right approach is to thicken the border. We can thicken the border all we want, but the bad guys do not come up to the border and ask for an iris scan. They cross the border on snow machines, or bicycles or they walk across the border through areas of the west.

In fact, I was at the Midwestern legislative conference last year and local politicians in North Dakota and South Dakota universally recognized this. When they start hearing about these border issues, they knew illegal activities were going on between the border points. If we are going to bring illegal substances into the United States, we are not going to bring it through the border. We are going to bring it across the border at another point.

The member is focusing on different areas, but I think we should be spending more time, as federal MPs, being involved with organizations like the Midwestern legislative conference. We see there is a lot of common ground there because they, like us, agree this is not the way to go.

• (1640)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his observation because we are all trying to be very positive and I do not think it helps the relationship by pointing to the negative. The fact is a border has two aspects to it. There is our side and there is their side. These kind of debates focus on the potential for criminal or suspicious behaviour to be one dimensional and one direction, from us.

We are trying to ensure that whatever comes between us has at least the appropriate infrastructure to give people in governments a sense of comfort that all issues are being addressed. If there are things that fall by the wayside, they need to be addressed immediately.

What is falling by the wayside today is the political and diplomatic relationship—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. We will have to move on to resuming debate. Some members might also like to participate in the debate.

The hon. member for Don Valley West.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to follow my hon. colleague from Eglinton—Lawrence. It is also a little daunting to follow someone whose words flow out so quickly and so easily.

It is a great pleasure today to speak to the motion from the member for Ajax—Pickering. The motion is not a negative motion, as it is being perceived. It is actually a motion of encouragement.

While it points out that the government has failed in its relationship-building process with the Americans to the south, it is also meant to encourage and to promote the kind of relationship that Liberal governments of previous years tried to build. We would like to see this continued in the future. It is meant to foster both trade and people moving across the border. It is also meant to promote a safe and secure border for both countries.

I have listened to the various speakers today and I wonder why I approach this question somewhat differently from others. I think it is

because of my background, growing up in Sault Ste. Marie. It is a border city, but a border city with a bit of a difference from other border cities. It is a border city where the Canadian side, in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, is five times the size of the Sault Ste. Marie in Michigan. That makes quite a difference in our understanding, our confidence, our self-respect and the way we look at the border. Growing up in Sault Ste. Marie, the border was always seen as something both special and ordinary. It was something extraordinary and normal.

We lived metres away from the border and on weekends or on special days, it would be fun to go across to the small town on the other side. However, we were really encouraging Americans to come over to our side to spend those American dollars. We wanted to get to know them. We wanted them to come to our businesses and our shops. We wanted them to come to our neighbourhoods. We wanted to invite them into our world. Especially when the American dollar was high, they loved to come over and spend those dollars in Canada. When the Canadian dollar was high, we learned that we could go over there and shop, and gradually over time, as a teenager, I began to understand that trade relationship.

I also understood that one did not always exploit comparative advantage. Even when gasoline prices were extremely low in the states, my father would remind me that my uncle owned a gas station. If we bought all our gasoline in the states, eventually there would be no gasoline stations in this country. He reminded me that the border did serve a certain purpose, to protect Canadians and businesses and to keep our livelihoods here.

The International Bridge opened up in Sault Ste. Marie when I was six years old, and that made crossing the border terribly easy. I do not want to romanticize those days too much, but we have to remember we all have a sense that the border is open. We have a sense of friendship when it comes to the Americans. We could cross easily. They could cross easily.

We do not live in that world today. We live in a much more dangerous and scary world. We want to both continue to protect the safe movement of people and goods across the border, but we also want to ensure that those who would do us harm, either people or goods, are stopped at our borders for our mutual protection.

The border then is that two-way mirror. On one side, it is a vehicle to promote the movement of people and goods. We also recognize it is absolutely critical and important that we stop certain things at our border and that the thickening of the border, about which people have talked, is meant to protect us as well.

In today's world, this is presenting a challenge to the government. The first step in that challenge is to build a relationship at the highest levels. We are expressing that the first failing of the government is to actually promote a relationship of easy, ongoing conversation where we talk about important things. We talk about them as friends, but we stand up for Canadian interests first.

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The recent comments by the Secretary of Homeland Security regarding the border, and her misunderstanding and misinformation, just weeks after a visit from the Minister of Public Safety of Canada, tells us that our message is not getting through, that the vehicle by which we have our ministers travelling to Washington, and they seem to be going there daily these days, does not seem to be working.

Either they are not expressing our concern well or we are failing to make ourselves heard. Ms. Napolitano, the secretary, is misunderstanding something when she states that our border is porous, that somehow we are the source of terrorism in that country. It is simply not true.

● (1645)

It is not good enough that the minister said that he chuckled with her just weeks before about this issue. It is not good enough that they are buddy-buddy, sharing a joke. The point is to do business. The point is to present Canadian concerns, ideas, thoughts, technology and interests to Washington. It is not simply to chuckle about what may or may not be current urban myths.

We all know that people and goods are slowing down at the border. I was in Thorold earlier this week meeting with a group of citizens who were talking about the dependence of the Niagara peninsula on trade and people moving quickly and easily across the border. It is just not happening any more and Canadian jobs, whether it is the auto sector, agriculture sector or any part of the supply chain, all those parts of our economy are being slowed down because the border is slow. It is slow but we are not safer because of it. If we were safer because of it, we could perhaps put up with some inconvenience, but we are not safer.

People in my riding express concerns daily about the flow of handguns across the border. They are constantly concerned that we are not doing enough to stop at our border the kinds of things that we do not want in Canada. If anything, I think we in Canada have more to fear about what is coming across from the south than anything we are going to send from the north to the south.

Ten times the population, 20 times the crime and 30 times the malevolent behaviour in the south is what we need to protect Canadians from. We need to protect our citizens by ensuring our border is secure but I do not believe the government is anywhere near doing that.

I want to raise a couple of issues that have not been raised. One is with respect to the U.S. department of agriculture. In 1991, it established a user fee called the animal and plant health inspection service user fee and Canada was exempt from that fee. For 16 years, Canada did not pay an inspection user fee for agricultural goods going into the country.

In 2007, with no notice given, a new fee was imposed upon our rail and trucking carriers. For the rail industry, it is \$7.75 a car. I know that does not sound like very much but that is \$8 million a year for an industry that is already somewhat precarious and marginal. That is \$8 million a year for a user fee going into the United States with no benefit for Canadians or Americans. It is a simple bureaucratic stroke.

The government was asleep at the switch and did not ensure that Canadian companies, farmers and consumers would be protected from those costs. It simply failed to look at it. I have asked the minister for a response and I am waiting for it. We need to ensure that non-tariff barriers to trade are stopped. The government needs to stand up for Canadians, Canadian businesses and Canadian citizens to ensure that we find a way to do business and trade well.

My constituents are also concerned about the number of times that people are profiled at the border based on their race, ethnicity and religion. My office receives calls daily from people who have been stopped at the border simply because their name ends in a vowel. They are held back, taken in for secondary inspections and interrogated differently than I would be interrogated. The colour of their skin, their religion and their place of origin may be different from mine but they are Canadian citizens. This is not only when Canadians go into the United States. They are also being stopped inappropriately when they return home. Our Canada Border Services Agency is turning a blind eye to this. We need to recognize that these are Canadian citizens who need to be welcomed back into their country, need to be given the respect they are due and that citizenship in Canada is indivisible.

These are border issues. These are why we stand, why we talk and why we want the government to address these issues.

● (1650)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to go to the member's last point because I, too, have dealt with a lot of constituents who have faced the issue of profiling. One of the things I think people are concerned about is that there is no oversight mechanism. Despite a variety of inquiries and despite the government having stated, in inquiry after inquiry, that it is necessary to have proper oversight, it is still completely lacking, which is part of the problem. The government's failure to put the oversight mechanism in place means people do not have a place to raise their concerns or complaints and ensure they are addressed. I wonder if the member wants to comment on that.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for that question because it is absolutely at the core. Each of the individual agencies are doing their work. We recognize that there are a variety of security and law enforcement agencies at play at the borders. Various agencies, such as the CBSA, the RCMP, CSIS and Transport Canada are watching and addressing these issues.

The problem is that despite repeated calls and the government saying that it would act, there is still no overall network or understanding of how we are to do this oversight. People and things are falling through the cracks. People do not know who to complain to or who to hold accountable and, therefore, people get hurt. The government has not taken the steps to ensure that we have an adequate umbrella oversight agency, as has been recommended by Iacobucci and O'Connor.

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Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, back in 2001, a lot of activity on this file was emanating out of both Washington and the government in power here at the time. One of the previous speakers mentioned where the programs actually started. When my good friend, Reg Alcock, was here, he was pushing and developing government online programs, even up against his own party at times. However, it seemed that once Reg Alcock was gone from the scene, the whole area kind of died. There does not seem to be much interest in the programs anymore. It is either a lack of interest on the part of the government or that it is just not promoting the programs.

How many NEXUS cards are actually out there? A government speaker made a speech just a few minutes ago talking about the NEXUS program. He had a wide opportunity to give us some figures but he never did. I would like to know how many people are actually using the NEXUS program.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Speaker, I am quite pleased to say that I have no idea. That is a question that should be addressed to that side of the House. However, it is a great opportunity to remember that the previous member, Mr. Alcock, should be returning here soon and we will be delighted when he is back in the House.

In the meantime, I am a new member and I am taking this issue very seriously. I think we need to let every member of the House know that this side of the House equally values both the friendship with the American government and the border as a means of protection and safe movement. We will stand up for the rights of Canadians. That is why we are here and that is why we were elected.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the motion reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government has failed to take all necessary steps to ensure that the U.S. administration and the U.S. Congress fully understand the critical importance of our shared border....

I have heard the speeches from the government side. In fact, I heard the intervention from the member for Essex. I think the government is living in la-la land.

It claims to have had a good relationship. The Prime Minister was called Bush lite. The government has increased paper screenings, surveillance and protectionism. It failed on softwood lumber and in seeking an extension on the western hemisphere travel initiative. How can Canadians be confident that the government will do anything to help in trade or in the Olympics?

• (1655)

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are beginning to understand that la-la land is a new border city that hey seem to be crossing over into quite regularly.

The hon. member for Don Valley East points out very quickly, clearly and succinctly that the government is failing in multiple ways of looking at this issue. Whether it is about passports, preparation for the Olympics, trade, tariff barriers or non-tariff barriers, people and goods are not moving quickly or efficiently.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the motion moved by the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering that we are debating here today reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government has failed to take all necessary steps to ensure that the US Administration and the US Congress fully understand the critical importance of our shared border to trade and economic security in both Canada and the United States; and must ensure that the Canada-U.S. border remains an efficient gateway through which our national security, personal, and commercial interests are properly promoted and defended.

It is a fact that we live next to a country with a much larger population and much more economic clout. Indeed, it has been the richest and most powerful country on the planet for some time. It is practically a universal law that more powerful are generally oblivious to what is happening to the less powerful. As a result, it is up to us to maintain our relationship with the United States, if we do not want it to develop certain prejudices, which, once again, are generally part of human nature. One such prejudice is that when one does not know the source of something bad, one assumes it is coming from somewhere else.

This opinion has been confirmed by certain things I have noticed in other areas of life. For instance, when people complain about crime, they always think it is coming from somewhere else. Much the same is true for other misfortunes. I was not really surprised by this, but the universal nature of this notion was confirmed for me when I saw someone as educated, intelligent and reasoned as Ms. Clinton reacting that way. At the time, she was already a New York state senator. When the great blackout occurred on this continent, Ms. Clinton thought it came from Canada. I have also noticed other situations. For example, in August 2003, she said:

[*English*]

Our best understanding right now is that whatever did happen to start these cascading outages began in Canada.

[*Translation*]

I noticed that she made comments along those lines about another matter. And yet, Ms. Clinton is certainly one of the most educated and competent individuals in the United States. She was a very serious contender for the position of first female president of her country. If even she is unable to steer clear of the unfortunate tendency of the more powerful lording it over those who are weaker, there are many others who give in to temptation more often than not. Those who have parliamentary relations with American legislators have noticed that, as you move further away from the Canadian border, U.S. senators and representatives are increasingly ignorant of what is happening in Canada. That is also the case for security measures.

Although they are based on prejudice that is deeply rooted in too great a portion of the American population, comparisons are made between security measures along the U.S. border with Canada and with Mexico, and demands are made that they be the same.

We should be cognizant of this state of affairs. Anyone who has had dealings with our neighbours realizes this. Therefore, the motion rightly states that the government has failed to take all necessary steps to ensure that the American administration is aware of our domestic security measures. In any case, one thing is certain: this government certainly has its weaknesses and the way it conducts its foreign policy is definitely one of them.

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●(1700)

In this regard, it was quite striking to hear the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière blame the members—

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me for the interruption, but I think there is a problem with the simultaneous interpretation. It is working now. The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, the attitude of the hon. member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière is typical of his party. When he heard that certain members of Parliament had gone to the United States to meet with some American legislators, he made fun of the trips and called them tourist jaunts. In my view, this only shows that if he had gone, that is probably all he would have found to do in the United States. The members who went and were tremendously well received and well informed by the Canadian embassy in Washington tell us that we do not go there often enough and that we need to cultivate sustained, ongoing relations with the Americans. The American press is generally not very interested in Canada and is poorly informed about how good our security is. The Americans should not be afraid that harm will come to them from Canada.

We also need to remind them—because many have forgotten—that when the going gets tough, they can count on their friend to the north. When the American embassy in Iran was invaded and occupied, for quite a long time the Canadian embassy sheltered the American diplomats who had not been taken hostage but would have been if the Iranian authorities had found them. That reminds me of the fable by La Fontaine in which a lion is caught in a net and is finally only freed thanks to a mouse that gnaws through the mesh of the netting. La Fontaine concludes that we often need someone smaller than we are.

We should all be familiar with this situation. The Conservative government has not made the necessary effort to defend our commercial interests, which have increased tremendously since free trade was instituted. In Quebec in particular, 27% of our production was exported. Now 51% of our production is exported and 80% of that goes to the United States. There are tremendous economic advantages, therefore, to keeping the borders fluid. We did a lot before and after September 11, 2001, to ensure they remained so.

One example of regular shipments of goods is the newsprint that Quebec delivers to New York. We export a lot of other products as well. We export paper but many other things too. Our biggest export to the United States is actually aluminum. Our second largest exports are in the aircraft sector, which is a real change in comparison with the last century and the last millennium. Then comes newsprint, turbojet engines, writing paper and paperboard, advanced copper wire and casings, integrated circuits and even petroleum oils, even though heaven knows that Quebec is not the largest petroleum producer in Canada.

So we are exporting more and more sophisticated products. Before the economic crisis, we were shipping products that were a lot more advanced and required intelligent work, such as aircraft and turbojet engines, and things will have to stay that way if we want to get over this crisis. We are talking about quite sophisticated goods here.

●(1705)

These things have become essential to our economy.

Protectionism is a natural reaction in times of crisis. We know, though—and this is the great lesson economists derived from the crisis in the 1920s—that protectionism makes the problem worse. The borders must be kept open because we export a lot, although we also import a lot from the people we export to. There is a mutual advantage, therefore, to keeping the borders open.

The government does not seem to realize all this. At a time when we should be trying to counter protectionist tendencies in order to overcome the crisis, the government is cutting the working hours of our customs officers, rather than trying to make the border more fluid. It is also reducing the modern equipment we have for monitoring the contents of trucks. I believe it is gamma ray equipment that makes it possible to check loads quickly and therefore speeds up traffic at our borders. They are also cutting border surveillance.

When the Conservatives were in opposition in 2006, they complained mightily—like us—that nine RCMP stations had been closed and they said they would re-open them. That promise went the way of most of their promises: they are in power now but have never re-opened the stations. They are giving guns to customs officers but taking away their overtime. They are giving guns to customs officers but removing some of the high tech equipment that keeps our borders fluid. That is typical of a government that calls itself conservative and is proud that it always looks to the past and gets inspiration there for what it wants to do in the future.

Once again, I think we should be aware of the dimensions of our trade with the Americans. I have it here in absolute numbers. I said it represented 51% or \$150 billion in 2007. I already listed the main products that go into this total. They are transported primarily by truck. In 2004—the last year for which these statistics are available—13.45 million tractor trailers crossed the border.

There are also 90 million people who cross the U.S. border, of whom 70 million cross by land. This government seems totally unaware of how important the border is, first of all to the Canadian and Quebec economies, but also to such other things as tourism. The most recent statistics I have come from 2006 and, on average, 27.5 million tourists were visiting Quebec each year. The tourism industry generated revenues of \$10.2 billion in 2005.

●(1710)

I spoke about the RCMP detachments and there is no point in revisiting that. It really shows the extent to which the Conservatives fail to take steps to reassure our neighbours to the south, and make promises they never keep. We are so used to them doing this that we do not need to spend much time talking about it. It is nothing out of the ordinary.

We absolutely agree with the member for Ajax—Pickering when he criticizes this administration both for its failure to grasp how important it is for us that our neighbours to the south feel safe and for constantly acting too late.

It nonetheless significant that in the first few days she was in office, a person with responsibility for overseeing land borders would say, and believe, that the terrorists who committed the attacks on September 11, 2001, came from Canada. She did have the honesty and intelligence to correct what she had said, but what she said was in fact significant. It was certainly what she thought when she said it, and it was what the people around her thought as well. There are people around her who thought these things.

I gave the example of Mrs. Clinton, whose first reaction to the electrical failures that caused a huge blackout in North America was to say that it had come from somewhere else, that it had come from Canada. It is therefore in our interests for the Americans to be better informed about Canada.

In addition, I would remind everyone that we are allowed four trips a year to Washington, which is fairly significant. When we visit the embassy in the United States, they tell us that this information is important and there should be more of it, because American legislators, legislators in the richest country in the world, in the most powerful country in the world, do not know much about countries that do not cause trouble for them. They probably know a lot more about countries that cause trouble for them, like Iran and Afghanistan and countries in the Soviet bloc, in that era.

And so we have to take action to combat that natural tendency. The Conservatives have a tendency to do exactly the opposite. They are cutting the overtime and equipment that help keep the border fluid, among other things.

I congratulate the member for Ajax—Pickering for presenting this motion and explaining it so clearly. I share his opinion entirely.

• (1715)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin for his excellent presentation on the importance of Canada-United States relations.

[*English*]

The member quite rightfully talked about the importance of the relationship between Canada and the U.S., that we cannot take it for granted and that we have to nurture it. He pointed out that has not been happening, that we have seen it going the other way.

In that same period of time, since February 2008 to February 2009, we have seen a decline in Canadian exports of some 20%. Of course, some of that is attributable to the state of the economy, but some of it is attributable to a thickening of that border.

One of the areas of particular concern to me is the western hemisphere travel initiative. Many years ago we knew that this passport requirement would be put in place, that it would be a huge barrier to this casual trading relationship that we have enjoyed and the free movement of people and goods across the border, and yet no solution was provided. It was left to the provinces to devise solutions and to do things. No federal response whatsoever was provided.

I wonder if the member could comment on that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, the member for Ajax—Pickering is correct. This is in fact something we were forewarned

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about. We were warned a long time in advance and the present government has done absolutely nothing to prepare for it. These are the last things in its initiative, when it could certainly have facilitated passport issuance or negotiated a less costly formula with the United States. It is quite unfortunate that it did not.

I am not the oldest member of this House, but I am still older than the average. I can still remember the day when relations between the two countries were so close that we could easily drive over the border in our parents' car to go on holiday down south. Our parents did not have to have any documents.

Cities were built on the border. I recently travelled to Stanstead. One family, whose name I forget but who had become very wealthy, lived in the area near Stanstead at that time, in Rouses Point, in the United States. It was a community. They decided to build a municipal library on the border. It is still there, so that education can be encouraged equally on both sides.

In any event, I understand that we now have to have a passport to go there, but the government could have facilitated things well before it did take action.

[*English*]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have a few minutes to join in on this very important debate today.

Our relationship with many countries of the world is important, but I suggest that there is none more important in terms of our trade relationship, as two countries side by side, than our relationship with the United States. Many of us have put a lot of time and effort into building that relationship, as governments have in the past as well, in establishing that very issue of communication.

Unfortunately, we have not been as successful as we should have been and as I believe we could have been. The comments that I will refer to shortly clearly point out that no matter how hard we seem to keep trying as parliamentarians, we are not getting our message out there, and calling on the government to do more is a logical thing to do, given the comments that were made.

Therefore, I am pleased to be commenting in the debate on the motion put forward by my colleague from Ajax—Pickering as the official opposition critic for public safety.

So that everyone knows exactly what we are debating, I will read out the motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government has failed to take all necessary steps to ensure that the US Administration and the US Congress fully understand the critical importance of our shared border to trade and economic security in both Canada and the United States; and must ensure that the Canada-U.S. border remains an efficient gateway through which our national security, personal, and commercial interests are properly promoted and defended.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the great member of Parliament from Davenport, who has a lot of comments on this and has put a lot of time and effort into it as well.

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We have a very special relationship, as I mentioned, with the United States, a unique partnership with a long and sometimes colourful history, where we always try to be respectful of distinct jurisdictions, principles and values, but it never ceases to amaze me how little the Americans know about Canada, no matter how much we try.

However, lately, ill-informed U.S. officials have been making wild accusations about the security of our shared border.

It is one thing for residents in the U.S., or U.S. citizens, not to have enough knowledge about Canada and somehow still think that Eskimos are running around our great country, but when we have representatives of the U.S. government completely ill-informed, it really is a cause for concern.

By now, I think many people have heard the outrageous comments by Janet Napolitano, the new Secretary of the United States Department of Homeland Security. She said:

Nonetheless, to the extent that terrorists have come into our country or suspected or known terrorists have entered our country across a border, it's been across the Canadian border. There are real issues there.

Clearly I think we need to invite this Napolitano to come to Canada more often so that she can really see that we have a very good security system and we continue to make it better, and the terrorists did not come from Canada.

When a reporter asked her if she was referring to the 9/11 terrorists, she answered:

Not just those but others as well.

I am uncomfortable even repeating the words she said, but we must fight back on things like that, because people have a way of only hearing a negative and that sits in their minds and they start to believe these things. Those comments have been made and have been shown many times to be completely false. To have someone in the position of Ms. Napolitano making those comments is something that I think we have to try very strongly to correct.

As if that was not bad enough, Republican presidential candidate John McCain defended her uninformed comments, someone who clearly should know better. McCain told FOX News, after Ms. Napolitano had said that she was incorrect in her comments:

Well, some of the 9/11 hijackers did come through Canada, as you know.

So we have one member of the government correcting her comments, and then we have Mr. McCain coming out and saying that she was correct in what she said, and they know that was not true.

• (1720)

Through this motion the opposition seeks to hold the government accountable for its failure to maintain a dialogue with our neighbour to the south and to correct misconceptions about our shared border.

In all these things, it depends on what approach is taken. How strongly does one react to those kinds of comments? I think one should act very strongly and not take it casually as if it were just somebody somewhere making those comments. The government should have reacted immediately and very aggressively to try to squelch those comments as soon as possible.

A secure border where goods and people can move efficiently and securely is critical to our relationship with our most important trading partner, the United States. More than 300,000 people cross the shared border every day. Over \$1.6 billion in trade occurs every day. Approximately 70% of that trade occurs by truck transport. Once that slows down, it has a huge impact on all the businesses in Canada, as well as in the U.S. It is not just a Canadian problem, it is a problem on both sides.

Time and time again, the government has failed to make the case that a thickening of the border will not enhance U.S. security and is in fact, as I said earlier, bad for business on both sides. Just as the Conservative government dropped the ball when it came to engaging and addressing the state of our economy, it has not played an active role in shaping decisions with our trading partners.

The Conservative government has let the Canada-U.S. trade relationship deteriorate. The government's mishandling of the financial crisis and the delay in bringing forward a stimulus package has meant that Canada has missed out on the opportunity to coordinate our response to the economic crisis with our largest trading partner. This failure had all of us scrambling just a few months ago to reach U.S. legislators and overturn existing legislation when we should have been promoting Canada's interests and leading the development of Canada-U.S. trade policy.

Relationships are behind every international trade statistic, all around the world. The lack of influence that Canada appears to now hold in the United States is the result of the government's failure to foster good relationships. The total absence of a considered, strategic approach to Canada-U.S. relations brought us to the brink on the trade issue earlier, and now the border issue, and will continue to hinder the government's ability to hold sway on other matters of critical importance such as border security, climate change, and of course, the all-important auto sector that we are all very concerned about.

Canadians can rest assured that the opposition will monitor the situation very carefully and will work to make sure that the Conservatives and the government will work with the Obama administration, as they have indicated they want to.

When the Liberals were in government, we had a point person for Canada-U.S. relations. The member for Kings—Hants spent almost 100% of his time on that. He was in cabinet and his role was specifically on Canada-U.S. relations. That is the reason we were making such strides in many fields on trade.

I would think the government would be far better off if it appointed somebody specifically. It is difficult to do that along with 10 other things. To have someone who sits at the cabinet table deal specifically with Canada-U.S. relations would be very helpful, especially now.

Strained relations with the United States have surely led to many of these misconceptions about Canada, and we on this side of the House will continue to work to ensure that those communications continue through at least the Canada-U.S. interparliamentary group that many of us are part of. It is a non-partisan group, and we will continue to work through that committee and elsewhere to try to dispel some of the comments.

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• (1725)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the comments of many of the members opposite today and I reflect on all the times during the last campaign and in the House that I have heard the phrase “American-style” used as a way of putting down other people.

I wonder if the member could also comment on what damage the previous government's response to 9/11 did to our relationship with the Americans. I would suggest that, in times of crisis, one of the things our most important trading partner and biggest friend will remember is how people responded.

I recall that presidents and prime ministers from around the world visited the United States soon after 9/11 occurred, yet it took the previous Liberal government some three weeks to get to the United States. It took the previous prime minister three weeks, and then when he got there, to add insult to injury, he decided not to visit ground zero because he had to make it back to Canada for a Liberal Party fundraiser.

I wonder if the member might comment on how that really started the demise of the relationship between Canada and the United States, especially coming after some extraordinary progress made by previous Conservative governments that led to a free trade agreement that has—

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for York West.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, following the 9/11 tragedy, clearly, as politicians we had to be extremely sensitive. Those are not issues that we wanted to be seen and accused of politicizing.

All kinds of communication was going on following 9/11 immediately. Was our government at the time doing photo ops? Most certainly not. The U.S. had our full assistance. Our police were there immediately. All of our fire and emergency people were immediately sent to the U.S. They helped immensely. That is part of our relationship. To suggest now that we were lax is going in the exact opposite way. We did a lot of work at that time. We have been doing a lot of work on Canada-U.S. relations for many, many years. What we are trying to focus on today is the need to do far more. The government should be reacting far more than it is.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my comments are directed not only to the member, but also to the member for Ajax—Pickering.

We could look at the European model and learn a lot from how those nations have made their borders easier to cross, encouraging the flow of people and trade.

Have the Liberals looked into this issue and what did they discover when and if they did?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, when we were in government, an immense amount of work was being done to ensure that our borders, especially since 9/11, would stay fluid so that people could go back and forth.

We are currently talking about bringing in the passport requirement in June. That will have a huge impact on both countries.

I have heard very little from the government side as to what it is doing to prevent that from happening.

The Vancouver Olympics are coming up. Everyone will require passports. There is still a huge backlog in the U.S. Many people will be denied the ability to come here because they will not be able to get passports in time.

We continue to do everything we can to facilitate the relationship and the free trade. I would ask that the government do the same.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after President Obama's visit, the Prime Minister did a fairly intense blitz of media outlets in the United States.

Would the member not think that perhaps he should do the circuit again, this time to explain to Americans the reality about the Canada-U.S. border?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, that would be a great idea. He seems to be on the news all the time talking about so many issues. I would certainly like to think that the government would ask for an immediate meeting. I can only hope it has done that already, following the kinds of comments last week.

It should have an immediate meeting with the president and make sure that he understands the issue. He is a well-travelled man. He knows Canada is a very safe country, that it is his biggest trading partner. They could be working together to solve some of these problems. I expect he has given a directive to some of his people to make sure their language is appropriate and that they are not putting out false statements.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion brought before the House by my colleague, the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering, on the Canada-U.S. border.

Much of what we are debating today may sound familiar because, quite frankly, it is. The issue of our relationship with the United States is an integral part of our history and it is essential that we continue to have these important debates.

Historians will recall that early American presidents, such as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, held a very specific view with respect to Canada, then of course British North America. To these American leaders, it was only a matter of time before their northern neighbour would be absorbed into the United States. Indeed in his time, Jefferson spoke of “the acquisition of Canada this year”. We know, of course, that this scenario did not materialize, but what did develop was a unique and deeply interdependent relationship operating at the level of finance and mutual security.

The impact of American culture has also been profound, as it has been on much of the world. There have been many leaders over the years who have spoken somewhat poetically of the Canadian-American relationship. It is indeed true that by virtue of geography, we have by necessity become partners on the vast North American continent.

However, like any relationship, whether between two people or hundreds of millions of people, work is required to make it work. One of the best observations I have read was by former president Harry S. Truman, who said:

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Canadian-American relations for many years did not develop spontaneously. The example of accord provided by our two countries did not come about merely through the happy circumstance of geography. It is compounded of one part proximity and nine parts good will and common sense.

With this in mind, it is clear that the key to continued success, and indeed improved relationships, lies in a recognition of our importance to each other and also a greater understanding at all levels.

It is certainly unhelpful to hear comments like those made recently by the Secretary of Homeland Security with respect to those responsible for the 9/11 attacks. In stating that these individuals travelled through Canada to the United States, she put forward a myth that is completely inaccurate but which, for many Americans, is nonetheless what they believe. Clearly, when the secretary responsible for border policy makes such statements, there is certainly reason for concern. Indeed, even the Republican presidential candidate in the last election had made similar comments.

I mention this not to incite anger or to harp upon the issue, but because it is important that such misconceptions not be allowed to go unchallenged. If they are not corrected, such beliefs will affect border policy as it develops. I give credit to the Canadian ambassador in Washington, Michael Wilson, for his clear and direct efforts to correct this misconception.

The reality of our cross-border relationship in economic terms is really quite staggering. Each day there is over \$1.53 billion in trade. Our annual trading relationship totals \$560 billion. Almost 300,000 people cross the Canadian-American border every day. Anyone who has driven to the United States can attest to the seemingly endless lines of transport trucks that cross the frontier on both sides. These numbers are not just statistics. They are a portrait of the depth of our relationship and the reality of our mutual dependence.

While there are many who express concerns about our interdependence, the reality is also that more often than not, the Canadian-American experience has been one that is mutually beneficial. However, as noted before by President Truman, relationships like this one require a great deal of work. It is not enough to simply say that we are neighbours. We must also ensure that we remain the best of friends.

Our proximity to the United States has provided us the opportunity to have unique and unparalleled access to the world's largest economic power. Similarly, the United States has benefited from having a friend along the world's longest undefended border.

Following the conclusion of the first world war and the Paris peace talks, the United States began its emergence as a superpower both economically and militarily. We here in Canada have benefited since then from our mutual relationship, but we must also be aware of our need to work diligently on our relationship with the United States.

• (1735)

Over the years there have been and continue to be many issues that we have had to work on; the United States tariffs during the 1930s Depression, the turbulent period during the Nixon presidency when relationships were quite cold, the free trade agreement and the

softwood lumber issues, disputes over Arctic sovereignty matters and cultural policy are but a few of the major concerns.

Now we face a rather serious one relating to the border and specifically how border security policy will impact cross-border trade. In times of economic uncertainty it seems that many American political leaders move toward notions of protectionism. An example is the buy American program recently proposed which was more about restricting access to the American market than about encouraging Americans to buy domestically produced goods.

In response to this we need to point out the facts with respect to our unique and interdependent relationship.

Canada has been the leading export destination for 35 of the United States and was in the top three for 46 states. At the same time a study commissioned several years ago indicated that upward of 5.3 million American jobs depended on Canadian-American trade. These numbers include approximately 600,000 jobs in California, 189,000 in Florida and almost 350,000 in New York. These are significant numbers of jobs. It is essential that these facts be considered when United States policy makers review the implications of revising border policy.

In the difficult realities of a struggling economy, it is often easier to look to apparently simple solutions like trade restrictions and tighter borders. The realities as shown by history are that these simply do not work. Indeed, the tariffs of the 1930s are generally recognized to have deepened and prolonged the Great Depression, delaying recovery for years.

Canada does have its friends in the United States who recognize the importance of our relationship. Many of the representatives who are elected from border states have been quite vocal in the need to keep our borders porous enough to support our great trading relationship.

Congresswoman Louise Slaughter from the Buffalo area has spoken out about her concerns over the June 1 deadline for all land travellers to have a passport. While 50% of Canadians hold a passport, only 28% of Americans do. We, like Americans, must recognize the impact of such policies on the tourism sector alone in both countries.

The government and indeed all of us in the House must work diligently to protect our relationship with the United States. Geography has made us neighbours but only our best efforts will ensure that our unique relationship continues to serve both our nations and our people well.

Quite simply, neither Canada nor the United States can afford policies that put our trading relationship at risk. This also applies to all other aspects of the Canadian-American experience.

Although we are in difficult economic times, geography, history and hard work by well-intentioned leaders has made North America the most successful trading relationship the world has ever seen. We must not allow narrow and short-sighted policies on either side of the border to threaten what has been for the most part a success story of historic proportions.

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I encourage the government to ensure that Canada's voice is heard in Washington and that we are diligent in promoting the importance of the Canadian-American relationship.

History has laid at our doorstep another of those pivotal moments when we are called to demonstrate leadership in the face of adversity and vision in the storm of uncertainty.

• (1740)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's speech was a very thoughtful one.

I was actually there when the ambassador made that statement and I thought it was a very strong statement. I want to publicly commend Ambassador Wilson for the strength of his statement and the careful way in which he phrased it. He delivered that message about as effectively as I think an ambassador could deliver a message.

I am somewhat more disturbed, however, by the minister who apparently was prepared to share chuckles with the secretary, meanwhile leaving Ambassador Wilson to actually deliver the message.

I would be interested in the hon. member's comments as to whether he thinks that the government should take a more proactive approach with respect to the rather unfortunate and regrettable comments by Secretary Napolitano.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, I do agree with my colleague. We are asking for the government to take a much more proactive stand. We are grateful for the comments that the ambassador has made, but we are very disturbed by the remarks of the secretary of homeland security.

The government has to do everything it can to contact everybody it knows in the Obama administration to make sure that these types of statements do not have legs. When these myths and misinformation get started, they tend to generate other discussions about the Canada-U.S. relationship which are totally not based on facts.

We need to make sure that the government does everything it can. The minister has to be serious about this issue. This is an important matter that could have serious and significant impacts on both our economies.

• (1745)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have another follow-up question because I did not get the appropriate answer from the member for York South—Weston.

I want to ask the Liberal member if he could help me understand how calling the Americans "idiots" and "morons", and other words that I will not repeat, during the last Liberal administration, helped develop our relationship? How was it that all of the other true supporters of our friends to the south were able to make it to Washington to lend their support, but the previous Liberal government was unable to get there? The member for York South—Weston suggested it did not want to involve itself in a photo op.

I would suggest that Americans were expecting Canadians to be there after 9/11, but it took us three weeks. The former Liberal prime minister could not fit ground zero, where thousands of Americans lost their lives, into his schedule because he had to make it back to a Liberal Party fundraiser.

It is this Conservative government that has put our relationship with the Americans back on track. It is this government that has left the border open to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Davenport.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, I tried to make my speech non-partisan, but I will not do the same thing in my answer. The reality is that we have an important relationship with the U.S. All of us have spoken to that fact. We have to do everything we can.

I was pleased to speak to this important motion presented by my hon. colleague from Ajax—Pickering. This is a serious debate that we are having here in the House. We are talking about the future of our country. The economic situation facing us is quite dire at this very moment. If we do not get serious about this initiative and get the government to become more proactive, we are going to have some serious problems economically.

We are here to do everything possible for our constituents and to make sure that we have a better relationship. It is so important and so vital to the economic interest of this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Thornhill.

I am happy to have this chance to reply to the motion proposed by the hon. member. It alleges that the government has failed to take all necessary steps to ensure that our American friends understand the critical importance of our shared border to trade and economic security and emphasizes that the government must ensure that the Canada-U.S. border remains secure and efficient and is managed in a way that reconciles a great variety of personal, commercial and national security interests.

Let me be the first today to reject the allegation that the government has not done everything it could to ensure that the American government understands we are determined to guarantee the security and accessibility of the border. Today's debate will show in fact that a host of extensive bilateral discussions are currently underway about our shared border and everything leads us to believe that they will continue to progress.

The Canada Border Services Agency, the CBSA, manages the flow of travellers and goods across the border in order to protect the sovereignty, security, health and prosperity of Canada. Of course, it is a bit more complicated than that. Every year, the CBSA manages the flow of almost 100 million people across the border and clears about 13 million commercial shipments and more than 32 million courier packages through customs, worth a total of about \$400 billion.

Although most of this work is done at 20 main land-border crossings, 14 international airports, three mail centres and four large marine container terminals, the CBSA provides services at 1,200 different locations all across the country, including 119 border crossings and hundreds of other land terminals, small airports and vessel reporting stations.

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The CBSA is also responsible for enforcing the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which means it handles thousands of claims for refugee status, detains people who could pose a threat to Canada, and removes people who are inadmissible to Canada. It must be aware of thousands of lookouts for people of interest, contraband and dangerous goods. It also handles cases covered by security certificates, which are an essential method of protecting Canada against terrorist attacks.

The CBSA also administers our trade laws and agreements, enforces trade remedies that help protect Canadian industry, and collects duties and taxes on imported goods. All these responsibilities make the CBSA's work very complicated and wide-ranging.

• (1750)

[English]

Over the past two decades, under both Liberal and Conservative governments, Canada has embraced free trade as a driver of economic prosperity and gained a reputation as a welcoming country for those seeking a better life. Attention at the border has gradually shifted from collecting import duties to emerging challenges related to contraband, illegal migration, health and safety, criminal and terrorist threats, and facilitating cross-border trade and commerce, the lifeblood of our economy.

Canada is a trading country and our ability to sustain and enhance our international trade capacity is key to our continued prosperity. However, let it be clear: security is job one at the border.

The events of 9/11, Canada's subsequent and continuing mission in Afghanistan, and the arrest and prosecution of suspected terrorists within our own borders have all sharpened our focus on issues of public safety and national security. We know that Canada is not immune from a terrorist attack and that we must constantly be on guard. We recognize our critical role in contributing to the security of Americans. As our hon. Prime Minister has stated, "There is no such thing as a threat to the national security of the United States that does not represent a direct threat to Canada".

The CBSA works within a robust and sophisticated border management framework that employs a scientific approach to risk assessment and detection. CBSA risk management is multilayered based on pre-approval programs to facilitate low-risk people and goods, advance information on people and goods coming to Canada, and risk-based intelligence. The idea is to push the border out to the extent possible to extend the enforcement of border policy to ports of departure around the world rather than strictly at points of arrival here in Canada.

This concept of pushing the border out is important. It is crucial that we try to discharge our security responsibilities not only where they will have the maximum impact from a security perspective but also with the minimum degree of intrusion or cost to business or individuals. The CBSA mandate contains parallel obligations to Canadians: secure the border and facilitate travel and trade. For just over five years, the agency has addressed these commitments simultaneously and with equal resolve. This is no small challenge, but the CBSA has done an excellent job.

The CBSA has made enormous progress in integrating parts of the old customs, immigration and agriculture inspection organizations

amid an unprecedented intensification of the security environment. In response to its dual mandate, the CBSA has introduced a number of innovative programs, which another speaker will outline a little later.

• (1755)

[Translation]

We have generally kept up with the United States at all stages of our high priority technology, systems and programs. We have implemented complementary strategies and maintained excellent inter-agency cooperation at all levels.

However, more remains to be done, together, to ensure that the 49th parallel continues to be a secure, efficient gateway for travellers and goods moving in both directions.

The CBSA now has a lot of human resources working on intelligence-related activities. It is setting new priorities and installing new systems that will help it focus its efforts better. The CBSA must also determine where it could invest abroad over the next five years. Its success will depend increasingly on its ability to gather foreign intelligence and forward that intelligence as quickly as possible to decision-makers.

[English]

In closing, it is the opinion of this government, gathered in direct consultation with our American colleagues, that Canada has taken all reasonable measures to ensure that the White House and Congress understand the importance of our shared border to trade and economic security in both Canada and the United States. Aside from words, both governments understand and appreciate the CBSA's actions on the ground toward a safe and secure border.

As we manage the flow of people and goods, we gain a better understanding of not only trade and travel patterns but criminal tendencies as well. This, in turn, allows us to improve our programs and policies in defence of public safety. Our ultimate objective is border safety and security that is sustainable in the context of our civil liberties and economic prosperity.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the government is doing everything it can, then how does the member explain that Secretary Napolitano is talking about treating the Canadian border with equivalence to the Mexican border? How can he explain the fact that in the House the minister says that there is no problem, yet every editorial in the country says there is a huge problem?

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The former ambassador to the United States said that this problem had gone viral. The current ambassador to the United States, appointed by the Prime Minister, said that it was a huge problem and he encountered again and again. Yet what we hear in the House is there really is no problem. In fact, today the Minister of Public Safety did what the member just did. He talked about 9/11 and why we should be afraid.

We are talking about the Canada-U.S. border. We are talking about the flow of goods between these two nations. There has not been an incident since 9/11. In fact, there has not been an incident in a decade, when the individual involved was detained and dealt with. Why does the member not talk about that? Why does he raise the spectre of 9/11 and fear, while talking about the Canada-U.S. border, instead of talking about the fact that there are no incidences and that we need to work closer and remove these barriers to trade?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has a tendency to see the glass always half empty or even one-quarter empty. The truth is we have made great progress with our neighbours to the south. In fact, our Minister of International Trade is currently in the U.S.A as we speak, building upon the great relationship we had with the former administration and now with the current administration.

Maybe part of the reason why that party is over there is because it did not know how to deal with our neighbours to the south. One of our colleagues talked about the Liberals' method of operations, but that did not work very well as we know. If I am not mistaken, a member left their caucus over the very comments she made about Americans to the south. Therefore, we do not need to take any lessons from the member or anyone on that side about how to build a relationship with our great neighbours to the south.

• (1800)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government must develop and implement a national tourism strategy, which must contain an extension of passport expiry time from five to ten years, increase accessibility to obtaining a passport through driver's licence bureaus and other alternative government locations. We also want significantly to reduce the price to obtain a passport. We are suggesting free passports for those under the age of 18. Right now a family of four is looking at over \$300 for passports. I do not think people are going to be overly quick to spend that. We also suggest free passports for veterans and half-price passports for seniors. I suggest the government even consider a 90-day period where it would provide free passports.

In addition to having the government consider these issues, how many NEXUS cards are in existence? Either members do not know or they will not say.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, many of those very suggestions have been discussed. They are good suggestions and they are the kind of thing on which the government is working.

We believe in facilitating Canadians crossing the border. We believe in facilitating trade across the border and having the Americans visit us. He mentioned tourism. We are big on tourism. We want American tourists to come and tour this wonderful country. With the co-operation of the parties opposite, we will be able to do that. In the spirit we want to set with this, the member as well as other members should look at how we could better enhance our

relationship with the Americans and go forward collectively together so we can build strong relationships and maybe make that border a little less ornery.

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise in the House today for this important debate. The government certainly recognizes the importance of maintaining an efficient and secure border with the United States. Good border management is critical for Canada because it supports our trade flows. It also supports the people to people relationships that have been build over the years, friends, family and colleagues from communities in each country who rely on efficient, secure and effective borders to maintain these relationships.

[Translation]

I can assure this House that the border was at the top of our list of many things to discuss with the new American administration.

As one would expect, it is also a major concern for the business community on both sides of the border.

[English]

We have listened closely to their concerns, including through the North American Competitiveness Council, NACC, and through other stakeholders that are worried about increasing unilateral U.S. security-related measures. Those measures cost money. They cost time. They eat away at the effectiveness of our cross-border trade.

The situation is compounded by a series of other challenges, including the current economic downturn, volatile energy and commodity costs, currency fluctuation and labour shortages.

[Translation]

Furthermore, both Canadian and American companies are concerned about the repercussions of the new rules and fees paid at the American border on our manufacturing exports. We are attacking these problems in many ways.

[English]

Senior officials across government meet on a regular basis through a range of channels to seek innovative means of managing a border that is both secure and efficient. During President Obama's visit to Canada, the Prime Minister and President Obama instructed senior officials to launch a renewed dialogue on border management.

We were encouraged to learn that senior U.S. officials, including Department of Homeland Security deputy secretary Jane Holl Lute, are seeking a new dialogue with Canada on border issues involving a key range of departments and agencies. These measures are positive developments and they will play an important role in Canada's ongoing efforts. Since 9/11, Canada has spent some \$10 billion on enhancing our side of the border.

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•(1805)

[Translation]

We will also invest \$75 million over the next two years to ensure that the CBSA has the resources it needs to deliver efficient and secure border services at more than 1,200 domestic and international locations.

[English]

These funds are being used to increase the number of on-site border services officers at key border sites and to meet evolving operational demands resulting from increased trade and travel.

We have also proposed an additional two year \$165 million spending package that includes \$26 million to introduce microchip biometric data in Canada's passports, also known as the e-passport. This project will be piloted in late 2008. It also includes secure visa issuance processes. That means Canada will be joining 42 other countries in their efforts to safeguard passports against tampering.

In support of trusted traveller programs, we have also allocated \$14 million to the NEXUS program for low-risk frequent travellers. This money will nearly double the program subscription rate from 130,000 to 350,000, helping to alleviate pressure at our land border crossings. A further \$6 million was allocated to help develop provincial enhanced drivers' licences, or EDLs. Several provincial EDL programs have been or are being introduced in the coming year.

Steps like these will help us to make our border with the U.S. even more peaceful and more secure.

[Translation]

Canadians can also be proud of the level of cooperation that exists between the two countries in terms of border management. Our border with the United States is one of the world's most secure and peaceful borders.

[English]

This is because of the unparalleled spirit of co-operation that exists among our law enforcement, our intelligence, border and immigration agencies.

At the same time, we know further investments in technology and infrastructure are required, above and beyond what I have already outlined. For example, it is a priority of our government to complete a new crossing at Detroit/Windsor. This is an enormously important border crossing for Canada, and that is why the construction of the Detroit/Windsor international river crossing, DRIC bridge, is so important. Construction of the bridge is part of a \$300 million commitment to improving infrastructure in the Windsor gateway. It will go a long way toward addressing traffic congestion, as well as security issues.

This is part of our work with the Government of Ontario through our "Let's Get Windsor-Essex Moving" strategy.

[Translation]

Furthermore, we are joining forces with the United States, the government of the State of Michigan and that of the Province of Ontario to thoroughly study the region's transport system, including roads, water crossings and inspection points.

[English]

Through the Detroit River international crossing project, we are aiming to have additional crossing capacity in place by 2013. Through these and other initiatives, we will continue to work with our partners in the U.S. to support North American global competitiveness and the rapid and efficient expansion of North America's busiest commercial crossing.

To keep our trade flowing, the Canada Border Services Agency is also delivering a variety of important programs. This includes the eManifest importer admissibility data, or IAD, initiative, which will be implemented by 2012. It also includes the free and secure trade, FAST, initiative, the partners in protection, or PIP, program, the customs self-assessment program, CSA, initiative, the commercial driver registration program, CDRP, and the advance commercial information, or ACI, program.

All these programs are aimed at streamlining border crossing processes for exporters and shippers and keeping our trade flowing smoothly and securely across our borders.

•(1810)

[Translation]

Lastly, we will pursue our efforts to prepare for the implementation of the western hemisphere travel initiative at both land and sea ports of entry beginning in June 2009.

[English]

Once implemented, cross-border travellers will be required to present a passport or an alternative document, such as an enhanced driver's licence or a trusted traveller card, when entering the United States.

From the very beginning, this government has worked to ensure that the implementation of the U.S. policy will have minimal impact on the cross-border movement of Canadian goods and Canadian travellers. Working with our partners in the U.S., we successfully rolled back the introduction of WHTI by 18 months. Our 22 missions in the United States, especially our embassy in Washington, were very active in this effort. They continue to play a crucial role in communicating the requirements of the WHTI to Canadian citizens living in the United States and working with the U.S. government on joint communications in both countries.

This government believes that any new border-crossing measures, including the western hemisphere travel initiative, with its passport rules for all travel to the U.S., should be implemented in a way that reflects the importance of the border to our societies and economies. Our border should continue drawing people and businesses together, not keep them apart.

This government recognizes the importance of keeping our trade, our people and our investment dollars flowing smoothly, efficiently and effectively through our borders throughout the North American space and around the world.

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[*Translation*]

In conclusion, we will continue to work to that end and with a view to ensuring that North America is better equipped to face competition in the future.

[*English*]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have heard myths from the government side about the very good relations it has had with our partner to the south, the United States government, and that it was cozy with the Bush administration. If the Conservatives were so cozy, why was there so much protectionism under that government?

I will quote something that was said by the current Minister of International Trade when he was the minister of public safety. He said, “We know that Canada is seen as a soft spot...of undesirable people, possibly criminal elements, being able to gain access to our country”.

If the senior ministers in the Conservative government are fearmongering and making Canada look like a porous border, how can Canadians trust the government to take the necessary action to prevent trade sanctions, travelling, et cetera?

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague might have finished the hon. member's quote.

We might also remember that the party opposite, when it was in government, did more to, apparently, deliberately alienate our neighbour and greatest trading partner than to build some of the bridges, not the least of which will be built across the Windsor crossing in the years ahead. In fact, since 2006 we think that Canadian-American relations have greatly improved.

I know the hon. members opposite love to deal in myths and torquing of the truth, and this includes all governments since 9/11, but Canada has spent more than \$10 billion in new security investments to protect Canadians. The reality is that the dialogue between our two countries is better than it has been for years. We are working together. There have been some misunderstandings and some misperceptions but the frank and open relationship that we enjoy with the new administration is proof positive that we are moving forward.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the supply proceedings.

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.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion, the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

● (1840)

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

(*Division No. 53*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Andrews	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Beaudin
Bélangier	Bellavance
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Bevington	Bigras
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brunelle	Byrne
Carrier	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Coady	Coderre
Comartin	Crête
Crombie	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Desnoyers	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dion	Dorion
Dosanjh	Dryden
Duceppe	Dufour
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter	Eyking
Faille	Folco
Fry	Gagnon
Garneau	Gaudet
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Guamieri
Guay	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-
Côte-Nord)	
Hall Findlay	Harris (St. John's East)
Holland	Hughes
Ignatieff	Jennings
Kania	Karygiannis
Kennedy	Laforest
Laframboise	Lalonde
Lavallée	Layton
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemay	Leslie
Lévesque	MacAulay
Malhi	Malo
Maloway	Marston
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Mendes
Minna	Mourani
Mulcair	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Nadeau	Neville
Oliphant	Ouellet
Paillé	Paquette

Business of Supply

Patry
Pomerleau
Rac
Ratansi
Rota
Russell
Savoie
Sgro
Silva
St-Cyr
Szabo
Thibeault
Trudeau
Vincent
Wasylycia-Leis
Wrzesnewskyj

Pearson
Proulx
Rafferty
Regan
Roy
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Siksay
Simson
Stoffer
Thi Lac
Tonks
Valeriot
Volpe
Wilfert
Zarac — 146

Young — 125

PAIRED

Members

Allison	Asselin
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cardin
Freeman	Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Holder	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Lessard	Plamondon
Rajotte	Richardson — 12

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Ambrose
Arthur
Baird
Bernier
Blaney
Boucher
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Cadman
Calkins
Casson
Clarke
Cummins
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fast
Flaherty
Galipeau
Glover
Goodyear
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hiebert
Hoback
Jean
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lemieux
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
O'Neill-Gordon
Oda
Payne
Poilievre
Rathgeber
Richards
Ritz
Scheer
Shipley
Stanton
Strahl
Thompson
Trost
Uppal
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Woodworth

Aglukkaq
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Anderson
Ashfield
Benoit
Blackburn
Block
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeschen
Dykstra
Finley
Fletcher
Gallant
Goldring
Gourde
Guergis
Hawn
Hill
Hoepfner
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lobb
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McLeod
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Obhrai
Paradis
Petit
Preston
Reid
Rickford
Saxton
Shea
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Toews
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wong
Yelich

[*English*]

OPPOSITION MOTION—FINANCE

The House resumed from April 23 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Thursday, April 23, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the hon. member for Sudbury relating to the business of supply.

● (1850)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 54*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Andrews	Angus
Arthur	Ashton
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Beaudin	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Bevilacqua	Bevington
Bigras	Blais
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brunelle
Byrne	Carrier
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coady
Coderre	Comartin
Crête	Crombie
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Desnoyers
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dion
Dorion	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duceppe
Dufour	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Easter
Eyking	Faille
Folco	Fry
Gagnon	Garneau
Gaudet	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Guarnieri	Guay
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Hall Findlay	
Harris (St. John's East)	Holland
Hughes	Ignatieff
Jennings	Kania
Karygiannis	Kennedy
Laforest	Laframboise
Lalonde	Lavallée

Government Orders

Layton
Lee
Leslie
MacAulay
Malo
Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Mendes
Mourani
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray
Neville
Ouellet
Paquette
Pearson
Proulx
Rafferty
Regan
Roy
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Siksay
Simson
Stoffer
Thi Lac
Tonks
Valeriotte
Volpe
Wilfert
Zarac— 147

LeBlanc
Lemay
Lévesque
Malhi
Maloway
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
McGuinty
McTeague
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Minna
Mulcair
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau
Oliphant
Paillé
Patry
Pomerleau
Rae
Ratansi
Rota
Russell
Savoie
Sgro
Silva
St-Cyr
Szabo
Thibeault
Trudeau
Vincent
Wasylcia-Leis
Wrzesnewskyj

Petit
Preston
Reid
Rickford
Saxton
Shea
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Toews
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wong
Yelich

Poilievre
Rathgeber
Richards
Ritz
Scheer
Shipley
Stanton
Strahl
Thompson
Trost
Uppal
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Watson
Woodworth
Young— 124

PAIRED

Members

Allison
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Freeman
Basques)
Holder
Lessard
Rajotte

Asselin
Cardin
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Plamondon
Richardson— 12

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[*English*]

HUMAN PATHOGENS AND TOXINS ACT

The House resumed from April 24 consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to promote safety and security with respect to human pathogens and toxins, as amended, be concurred in.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at report stage of Bill C-11.

The hon. chief government whip is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I believe that if you were to seek it, you would find agreement to apply the vote from the previous vote to this vote with Conservatives voting yes.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting in favour of this motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the members of the Bloc Québécois will be voting against this motion.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the members of the NDP will be voting in favour of this motion.

Mr. André Arthur: Mr. Speaker, I am voting in favour of this motion.

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

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Ambrose
Ashfield
Benoit
Blackburn
Block
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Finley
Fletcher
Gallant
Goldring
Gourde
Guergis
Hawn
Hill
Hoepfner
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lobb
Lunn
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McLeod
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Obhrai
Paradis

Aglukkaq
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Anderson
Baird
Bernier
Blaney
Boucher
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Cadman
Calkins
Casson
Clarke
Cummins
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fast
Flaherty
Galipeau
Glover
Goodyear
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hiebert
Hoback
Jean
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lemieux
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menzies
Miller
Norlock
O'Neill-Gordon
Oda
Payne

Government Orders

(Division No. 55)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Anderson
Angus
Ashfield
Atamanenko
Bains
Bélangier
Benoit
Bevilacqua
Blackburn
Block
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Cadman
Calkins
Casson
Chong
Christopherson
Clement
Coderre
Crombie
Cullen
Cuzner
Davidson
Davies (Vancouver East)
Del Mastro
Dewar
Dhalla
Dosanjh
Dryden
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dykstra
Eyking
Finley
Fletcher
Fry
Gallant
Glover
Goldring
Goodyear
Gravelle
Guarnieri
Hall Findlay
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hiebert
Hoback
Holland
Ignatieff
Jennings
Kania
Kennedy
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Layton
LeBlanc
Lemieux
Lobb
Lunn
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Maloway
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
McCallum
McGuinty
McLeod
Mendes
Merrifield
Minna
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray

Aglukkaq
Allen (Welland)
Ambrose
Andrews
Arthur
Ashton
Bagnell
Baird
Bennett
Bernier
Bevington
Blaney
Boucher
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Byrne
Calandra
Carrie
Charlton
Chow
Clarke
Coady
Comartin
Crowder
Cummins
D'Amours
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Dechert
Devolin
Dhaliwal
Dion
Dreeschen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter
Fast
Flaherty
Folco
Galipeau
Garneau
Godin
Goodale
Gourde
Grewal
Guergis
Harris (St. John's East)
Hawn
Hill
Hoepfner
Hughes
Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Lebel
Lee
Leslie
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi
Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Mulcair
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville

Nicholson
O'Connor
Obhrai
Oliphant
Patry
Pearson
Poilievre
Proulx
Rafferty
Rathgeber
Reid
Rickford
Rota
Savage
Saxton
Scheer
Shea
Siksay
Simson
Stanton
Storseth
Sweet
Thibeault
Toews
Trost
Tweed
Valeriotte
Van Loan
Verner
Wallace
Warkentin
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wong
Wrzesnewskyj
Young

Norlock
O'Neill-Gordon
Oda
Paradis
Payne
Petit
Preston
Rae
Ratansi
Regan
Richards
Ritz
Russell
Savoie
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Shipley
Silva
Sorenson
Stoffer
Strahl
Szabo
Thompson
Tonks
Trudeau
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Volpe
Warawa
Wasylycia-Leis
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to

Wilfert
Woodworth
Yelich
Zarac— 228

NAYS

Members

André
Beaudin
Bigras
Bonsant
Bourgeois
Carrier
DeBellefeuille
Deschamps
Dorion
Dufour
Gagnon
Guay
Côte-Nord)
Laforest
Lalonde
Lemay
Malo
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Nadeau
Paillé
Pomerleau
St-Cyr
Vincent— 43

Bachand
Bellavance
Blais
Bouchard
Brunelle
Crête
Demers
Desnoyers
Duceppe
Faillie
Gaudet
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-

Laframboise
Lavallée
Lévesque
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Mourani
Ouellet
Paquette
Roy
Thi Lac

PAIRED

Members

Allison
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Freeman
Basques)
Holder
Lessard
Rajotte

Asselin
Cardin
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les

Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Plamondon
Richardson— 12

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1855)

[English]

JUSTICE

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the government came into power, it promised it would increase the number of local police in many of the large cities to deal with gun and gang violence. I asked this question of the minister in the House and now I am asking the minister to please explain to me why that promise was broken.

When we look at British Columbia we will find that metro Vancouver has fewer police officers per capita than any other big city. Data from Statistics Canada tells us that the case burden, compiled with the number of officers per a population of 100,000 puts Vancouver at the bottom of the pack. We all know that there was a promise of more police officers, which never materialized. The promise was repeated in the 2006 budget. It was repeated in the 2007 budget and it never came to fruition. The money has not actually been seen.

We know now that it waited. As per usual with the government, nothing happens until a crisis occurs. When we look at what has been happening in Vancouver since January, with large numbers of murders and drive-by shootings, all of a sudden this came back on the agenda three years later. This could have been done. It could have assisted the Vancouver police to deal with some of the problems they are facing with regard to guns and gangs.

My question is obviously to the minister. I know that the minister will tell me that the money was put in this budget and that there are now new bills that are coming forward to deal with the issue of guns and gangs. However, I need to tell the minister that the police are not so sure about this money that is forthcoming. They want to be sure that the money that does come is going to be adequate and sustainable. In other words, they want to be sure that the money is not going to be there for six months and then disappear again.

There needs to be a continuing assessment of the needs of the populations with regard to police in some of the large cities in Canada. As we can see, Vancouver is one of those cities. The police are asking for long-term, sustainable federal funding for police officers to give them the tools they need to keep them up to date. They do not want that money to be used to replace police officers who are now at the right age to retire, et cetera. They want new police officers. Twenty-five hundred new police officers were promised for Canadian cities. Twenty-five hundred new police officers have to be there, not filling in the gaps and replacing those who have been lost.

The other thing is eligibility. The police have told me that one of the big problems they have is that this money has suddenly been handed to the provinces. That money is sitting somewhere and the provinces have yet to move this money forward to the police forces. They are really concerned that this is not going to be used for new

Adjournment Proceedings

police officers. They are concerned that this is going to be used as a replacement for police officers and for the attrition of police forces.

My question to the minister is this. Why did the Conservatives not keep their promise to replace the police force and put in new police officers to deal with guns and gangs as it did in 2006? Now that they have done it, why are they not doing it in a way that will make it sustainable and ensure that there are new police officers?

• (1900)

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to participate in the adjournment debate on this important issue.

Recently, British Columbia has been hit by a wave of gang-related violence. Nearly every day, we hear about gang-related shootings that take innocent lives and make people afraid to go outside. Over the past few weeks, more than two dozen shootings, nine of them fatal, have taken place in the greater Vancouver area.

The Government of Canada recognizes that organized crime and gang-related activity still threaten safety on our streets and in our communities. The government is taking legislative measures to put an end to this.

The government has invested in crime-prevention activities targeting at-risk youth, activities that focus on gangs, guns and drugs. Young gang members commit many crimes; they are responsible for many more serious and violent crimes than young people who do not belong to gangs.

More specifically, the gangs, guns and drugs priority of the Department of Justice's youth justice fund has \$2.5 million each year to carry out crime prevention programs across the country. Since 2006, 38 projects have been funded in a number of communities, including Toronto, Vancouver, Fort Qu'Appelle, St. John's and Montreal, that wish to reduce activities related to gangs and the recruitment of young people who, in the opinion of the justice system, are considered to be participants or are likely to participate in activities related to guns, gangs or drugs.

There is also the youth gang prevention fund, which is managed by the national crime prevention centre. This fund has a budget of \$11.1 million and implements community intervention initiatives for youth who are in gangs or at risk of joining gangs.

In terms of law enforcement, the government has also allocated \$64 million, under the national anti-drug strategy, to help law enforcement agencies to combat drug trafficking, which is the main activity of organized crime.

Bill C-14, introduced on February 26, 2009, contains proposals that will provide solutions to a number of problems related to gang violence, including increasingly bold acts of armed violence committed by street gangs.

Adjournment Proceedings

Bill C-14 addresses the problems of drive-by shootings and the discharge of firearms with intentional disregard for the life or safety of another person. This new offence carries a minimum mandatory sentence that can be increased if the offence was committed for the benefit of a criminal organization or with a prohibited or restricted firearm.

With this bill, all murders closely tied to organized crime will be first degree murders, even if they were not planned and deliberate. It will also strengthen provisions with respect to gangs keeping the peace so that it is easier for judges to impose conditions that they believe will help prevent an individual from committing an offence for the benefit of organized crime.

In closing, I wish to tell members that this bill represents a solid and measured response to the threats that firearms and gangs pose to Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, that is all very nice. I received a full strategic plan for dealing with guns and gangs in the cities of Canada. What I did not get was a clear answer to my question.

My question was simple. A promise was made in 2006 and the Canadian Police Association is calling upon the government to keep that promise. The promise was to recruit 2,500 more front-line officers. At the moment, the police officers' recruiting fund is not sufficient. What is there has been handed over to the provinces. This money was supposed to go to police associations and municipalities to recruit 2,500 new officers for the streets.

We are talking about front-line officers. We know that the former public safety minister entered into arrangements with the provinces and territories that would authorize the use of the police—

• (1905)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but I must interrupt the hon. member.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Speaker, as I just said, the government has taken several steps such as implementing programs and introducing Bill C-14 to do his part in curbing gang violence in Canada. The government has always been committed to ensuring the safety and security of Canadians, and I trust that the opposition supported the passage of Bill C-14.

Federal public servants are continuing to work closely with their provincial and territorial counterparts to examine issues related to organized crime and gangs that arise or become pressing, develop strategies to prevent and deter organized crime and gangs, and identify areas that would benefit from legislative changes designed to make our criminal justice system as efficient as possible.

[English]

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to follow up on a question that I asked about two months ago regarding the unfortunate and tragic death of Ashley Smith who died on

October 19, 2007. She committed suicide while incarcerated in segregation at the Grand Valley Institution for Women.

The Office of the Correctional Investigator wrote a report on this and concluded that there was reason to believe Miss Smith would be alive today if she had not remained on segregation status and if she had received appropriate care. This was a preventable death. In fact, the report of Mr. Sapers of the Office of the Correctional Investigator Canada, dated June 20, 2008, actually called it a preventable death.

The report was presented to the government in June 2008, almost a year ago, two months after it was made public. There has still not been any formal response by the government to the report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator. This is shocking. It speaks of some kind of indifference by the government as to the plight of women in our prisons.

Next week, May 4 to 10, is National Elizabeth Fry Week in Canada. This is an organization that helps women prisoners and people who are incarcerated. It is important that this issue be brought to the forefront and that we get some answers from the government about what it proposes to do.

It is not just Miss Smith's situation, unfortunate and tragic and so blatant that it is. There have been over 20 reports, investigations and commissions of inquiry chronicling the urgent need for oversight and accountability mechanisms to address the violations of the rights of women prisoners in Canada. This has been going on for some time.

In 1996, Louise Arbour, who is probably the most eminent international lawyer and jurist in Canada, issued a report into the illegal stripping, shackling and transfer and segregation of women prisoners at Kingston. She found that the culture of Correctional Service Canada was one of disrespect for the rule of law. She recommended that there be mechanisms to allow for the judicial oversight of issues such as segregation. She wrote an article in the *New Brunswick Telegraph Journal*, dated April 4, in which she referred to the segregation system as a prison within a prison and that there ought to be judicial oversight of that particular process. In fact, many commentators refer to lengthy segregation as a form of torture.

Miss Smith was in segregation for a full year before she committed suicide. There needs to be an effective grievance procedure, with opportunities for redress. Grievances lodged by Miss Smith were sitting untouched in a grievance box.

There needs to be civilian oversight in Correctional Service Canada greater than that of the Office of the Correctional Investigator who, for the most part, can only investigate complaints.

We need a serious response by the government, not just a statement that it is trying to do better.

In 2005 the United Nations Human Rights Committee called on Canada to remedy the discriminatory treatment of women prisoners.

These problems were not all created by the current government, but it has an approach to corrections which says we should put more people in jails and have mandatory minimum sentences. The government has an obligation to look after people who are incarcerated.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1910)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to the question raised in the House on March 4 by my hon. colleague from St. John's East regarding the report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator on the events leading to the death of Ashley Smith.

First, let me start by offering my sincere condolences to Ashley Smith's family and provide some reassurances that this incident has been taken very seriously.

A number of staff members and managers of Grand Valley Institution for Women have been disciplined and in some cases employment has been terminated. While I am not at liberty to discuss Ms. Smith's medical history, I would, however, offer the following information.

The Office of the Correctional Investigator's report contains 16 recommendations that focus on preventing future deaths in custody by identifying areas for improvement in the following: responses to medical emergencies, the delivery of mental health services and compliance with law and policy related to segregation, transfers, processing of offender grievances and use of force interventions.

Following Ms. Smith's death, the Correctional Service of Canada acted quickly to investigate and report on the circumstances surrounding the incident, identify weaknesses and to take corrective action where necessary. The service is committed to working with the Office of the Correctional Investigator to address issues and concerns in the area of deaths in custody.

An action plan has been developed to respond to recommendations of investigations into this incident and a number of measures have already been implemented. The following are specific actions that the service has taken to prevent deaths in custody.

First is a pilot project. A mobile interdisciplinary treatment and assessment and consultation team has been put in place to support women's institutions in the management of women offenders with severe mental health and/or behavioural difficulties. The pilot project will enhance the input and advice available to correctional staff when making decisions related to the management of women offenders with complex mental health issues.

The service has reviewed its capacity to address the needs of women offenders with complex mental health and behavioural needs. Short term and long term action plans have been developed on service, support and accommodation needs for women offenders identified in this group.

Mental health awareness training for staff has been developed and provided to many community and institutional staff across Canada. The service delivers suicide prevention training to all staff who have regular interaction with offenders in order to detect and respond to behaviours that may be indicative of suicidal or self-injurious intent.

The policy related to segregation has been amended to explicitly include a stronger role for the chief of health care and psychology. Although the service has had a mental health screening process for some time, in 2008 the service began piloting an enhanced mental health screening process to be administered when an officer is

admitted. The service is committed to improving dynamic security to ensure that every inmate is engaged by staff members on a daily basis. The agency will strengthen the dynamic security training module for all new correctional services.

Finally, it is important to note that the service is working closely with the federal government's recently established Mental Health Commission of Canada, which has been mandated to develop a national health strategy and share knowledge and best practices for the benefit of Canadians.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, recognizing that some changes have been made, it is shocking to discover that, although the Correctional Service of Canada has been providing health care in institutions for over 100 years, in 2006 more than half of the sites failed to be accredited for health care, 38% were accredited with conditions and only 10% were fully accredited. Two of the key factors that prevented accreditation include the inadequacy of an existing clinical governance structure and the absence of continuing professional education training for health care staff. This is an indication of how bad things are.

We are concerned, not only with deaths in custody but also, of course, the treatment of women. Too many women are incarcerated. Over 80% of them are there for property crimes. They do not pose a danger to society. Something should be done to ease the amount of incarceration that women are subjected to in this country. It has been found to be discriminatory and Correctional Service of Canada should look toward that as well.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, this is a very complex matter that has reinforced the need for the service to further strengthen its approaches to the challenges of women offenders, particularly those with serious behavioural and mental health concerns.

Furthermore, an action plan has been developed to respond to recommendations of investigations into this incident and a number of measures have already been implemented. Some of the initiatives are still ongoing.

The service has reviewed its capacity to address the needs of women offenders with complex mental health and behavioural needs. Short term and long term action plans have been developed on service, support and accommodation needs for women offenders identified to be in this group.

In addition, the service has implemented an enhanced mental health screening tool at intake for all offenders and will be working toward developing an ongoing tool for assessing suicidal tendencies of inmates that can be used by health care and front line staff.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1915)

[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to address the House here today to reiterate to the Conservative government that urgent action is needed to help the forestry industry. Indeed, the crisis currently facing that industry has reached record proportions.

On March 9, 2009, I asked the government across the floor what it was waiting for to help the forestry workers in the Outaouais. The Minister of State replied by saying that he was very sensitive to the plight of workers, but that they were the victims of the global forestry situation.

Those workers need a lot more than sensitivity. We all feel for these victims of the economy. However, more than sympathy, the industry needs financial support such as loan guarantees. The Outaouais, like many other regions in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia, has been hit hard by this unfortunate crisis.

On October 31, 2008, the Smurfit-Stone company closed its doors for good, laying off 218 people. That closure was absolutely devastating, considering it happened in a rural, isolated area like Portage-du-Fort. That plant in the Pontiac had been open since the 1960s and produced pulp and paper.

On April 14, the AbitibiBowater plant in Gatineau pulled one of its machines from production. That will mean a work stoppage for 50 workers. This is not the first work stoppage at this plant, which temporarily laid off 358 workers in January. And every time, people ask themselves where this government is hiding.

Another company, which was to close its doors temporarily from April 3 to 13, stayed closed longer than anticipated. The Papiers Masson plant wanted to reduce production and laid off 50 workers the first time it closed and nearly 200 employees when it closed again later.

In Thurso, which is also in the Outaouais, the Papiers Fraser plant closed temporarily to reduce its inventory. That production shut-down, which lasted eight weeks, put 300 people out of work.

In Clarendon, in the Pontiac, the Maibec plant announced the temporary closure of its shingle plant. The plant, which employed 56 workers, may resume production if market conditions pick up.

More than 7,500 jobs are at risk at AbitibiBowater alone. What is the government doing to help these workers? It is expressing its sympathies and setting up a committee.

What workers need is an action plan like the one we, the Liberals, had in 2005. It was a real plan to help the forestry industry, not a committee to drag things out. Our plan addressed key issues like allocation of loans, research assistance, new technologies, skills development and community adjustment. The Conservatives cancelled our plan when they came to power, but they have not put in place a comprehensive plan for the forestry industry.

I firmly believe that the government must help the forestry industry and the people who work in that industry. Instead of watching equipment rust, we need to help these companies get

through these tough times. That is what being sensitive means. When will this government take action? When will it help forestry companies and workers?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of my hon. colleague, the Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), allow me to answer a question raised by the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer, who was wondering what the government was doing for the forestry industry. The unveiling of our most recent action plan speaks volumes.

The forestry issue is one of the problems addressed in our plan. It is not an isolated problem; it is part of a broader, global problem. Forestry workers in Canada and Quebec are being affected by a combination of factors that have hit their industry hard, the main one being the lack of potential buyers. Over the past few years, softwood lumber and structural panel exports have fallen in terms both of volume and value because of a decline in housing starts in the United States. The fact is that, year in, year out, there used to be 2 million housing starts in the United States, but these are now down to 700,000.

The high-risk mortgage lending crisis and reduced demand for newsprint made things even worse. It might not be coincidental that several American dailies have declared bankruptcy. Add to that the rising value of the Canadian dollar and fierce competition from international producers, and you have the makings of a crisis.

We have acted quickly to limit the repercussions of the crisis on the forestry industry and its workers through our economic action plan. Our plan supports the development of new products and processes to help the industry benefit from international market opportunities. The government will provide \$170 million over two years to secure a more sustainable and competitive forest sector. We have decided to extend, over the next two years, work-sharing agreements by 14 weeks, to a maximum of 52 weeks, to help businesses recover from the global economic downturn.

I want the member to know that we are not the only ones taking action on the forestry file. Issues related to the forestry industry fall mostly under provincial jurisdiction. That is why federal-provincial collaboration is critical for the forestry industry to get the support it needs. Together with the Government of Quebec, our government recently announced the creation of a Canada-Quebec forestry task team.

The Canada-Quebec forestry task team will focus its efforts on the following six areas and report back on the situation by May 15: forest management and silviculture, supporting forest workers and communities, access to credit, technology and innovation, value-added manufacturing and market development for wood products.

In our economic action plan, our government has also established a \$1 billion adjustment fund for communities affected by the economic crisis. Our government will expedite the allocation of \$211 million from this fund to Quebec. Priority is being given to the forestry sector for this financial assistance.

The Canadian forestry sector is obviously undergoing a large number of changes and restructuring because of the difficulties it is facing. Representatives of this industry are very clear in this regard. They are asking the government to work with them in order to overcome these difficulties and enable the forestry industry to lay out a path for the future. Such is the expectation of people in the sector and that is what we are working on together with the provincial governments.

As we have already said, our government is very aware of everything that is happening to forestry workers across Canada. We are monitoring the situation very closely—

• (1920)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, this government has simply abandoned the forestry industry. It has also abandoned forestry workers laid off in small forest communities hard hit by this crisis.

The Conservative government had said that the softwood lumber agreement would put an end to the disputes with the Americans, but that is not true. This government is using that agreement to refuse to give loans to forestry companies. It is sitting on its hands while workers suffer and rural communities deteriorate.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Conservatives are wrong. The government must defend the interests of the forestry industry and the thousands of people who work in that industry.

Why does this government have nothing to offer forestry workers, and when will it submit a real plan to help the forestry industry to this House?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, as I said, our government is working hard to help the forestry industry and its workers. Our government is acting to minimize the effects of the crisis on the forestry industry and its workers. We have taken numerous measures to support key economic sectors. Our most recent economic action plan includes strategic support for the forestry sector and its workers.

In addition, our government, together with the Government of Quebec, has agreed to put together a Canada-Quebec task team to coordinate the implementation of measures to support Quebec's forestry industry. All of the measures implemented through the partnership will comply with the softwood lumber agreement signed by Canada and the United States. Together, these measures demonstrate our commitment to finding solutions to this crisis that are in the best interest of workers, the industry and the country.

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

(The House adjourned at 7:25 p.m.)

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