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Monday, May 11, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 11, 2009

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

COMPETITION ACT

The House resumed from March 6 consideration of the motion that Bill C-273, An Act to amend the Competition Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (right to repair), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to stand in the House today to share my thoughts on Bill C-273, An Act to amend the Competition Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (right to repair).

I commend the member for Windsor West for bringing the bill before us today.

In short, the auto industry is being asked to make available to third party repair shops intellectual property information and diagnostic equipment, among other things, perceived by some to be exclusively available to auto dealerships.

This is a matter of utmost importance involving issues of vehicle safety and the protection of intellectual property rights of auto manufacturers on the one hand, and small business needs for information on the other.

Though a challenge in striking a balance between competing interests, it is one that can be met without the need for invasive legislation, the effect of which will lead to the complete erosion of intellectual property rights of auto manufacturers and manufacturers of other equipment whose IP rights will be threatened by this precedent setting legislation.

I would like to spend a moment to offer my specific concerns with regard to Bill C-273. We know that Canada's non-franchised, non-dealership repair facilities conduct the majority of parts and service business in Canada. Clearly the absence of this legislation will not be a threat to an already thriving industry.

Another important fact is that a significant amount of repair and diagnostic information is often already available to the independent

mechanics in garages through third party information providers on line for a monthly fee.

Further, with the advent of new technology like powerful hybrid batteries requiring expensive tools, gloves and diagnostics, only the best equipped mechanics can manage the safety issues arising with specialized equipment.

Other than two or three very large national auto repair shops able to afford the training and equipment required to conduct such services, who are we really helping? Would we be passing legislation to accommodate only two or three national repair shops when they all otherwise have access to necessary information?

Manufacturers go to considerable expense to develop the technology that we see in automobiles today. They also go to considerable expense to develop the training, tools and diagnostic equipment dealers use to repair these cars.

We are all well aware of the significant challenges facing our auto industry today. I believe it would be counterintuitive to place additional demands and regulations on the struggling auto sector at this particular time.

General Motors alone is expected to close 300 dealerships across Canada as part of its restructuring. I am assured that the location of dealerships closed will be strategic so that access to dealer servicing will remain available.

This is not the time for Canada's sagging auto industry to be confronted with new challenges. At this time the industry is being hit by a tsunami of events: lack of credit, plant shutdowns and recession.

We are asking, demanding, that the auto sector restructure into a leaner, more agile industry. It is not the time to regulate the industry out of existence entirely by requiring it to give up intellectual property rights completely for the benefit of its competitors.

Frankly, this might be considered by some to be an affront to normal business ethics.

I was pleased to learn last week that the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers of Canada, the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association and the National Automotive Trade Association have committed to the creation of a voluntary framework on this very issue.

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This co-operative effort will put in place a framework that would establish a voluntary system for the systematic dissemination of repair and diagnostic information; a positive first step toward the further dissemination of information.

Surely, successful voluntary efforts are preferable to yet more legislation. Imagine all the additional costs of passing the legislation, monitoring compliance, amending it and enforcing it; cost to the industry and government and in each case cost to the taxpayer.

Of particular interest to me is the national automotive service task force that exists in the United States. This voluntary task force is considered by the assembly industry, dealers, many in the auto service industry and consumers alike, to be common ground where the needs of consumers on the one hand and the safety concerns and intellectual property rights of manufacturers on the other are addressed satisfactorily.

The national automotive service task force is a voluntary, co-operative effort among the automotive service industry, the equipment and tool industry, and automotive manufacturers. The task force ensures that automotive service professionals have the information, training, and tools needed to properly diagnose and repair today's high-tech vehicles, assures the flow of relevant information, and includes a system to deal with complaints.

A Canadian version of this task force is what is ultimately proposed by the industry.

We will be told by some that the American voluntary system is legislated. In fact, only a very small part is, a part dealing with emissions. The vast majority remains, indeed, voluntary.

I have learned that the industry has already begun working groups, including manufacturers and after-market servicers, to develop the technical and non-technical provisions of a voluntary model, from tooling to training, with an estimated time of arrival no later than September 1, 2009.

Once fully implemented, the national permanent and voluntary Canadian agreement would create a framework to provide all Canadian after-market service and repair providers with the desired and agreed upon information from all Canadian manufacturers and distributors, in a similar fashion as in the U.S.

Canada's auto industry has a long and successful history of developing, implementing and enforcing voluntary memorandums of understanding. In fact, 14 voluntary memorandums of understanding have been signed to date and the industry has met or exceeded the terms of each one of them.

Legislating the forfeiture of the auto industry's IP rights is akin to demanding the forfeiture of a food retailer's secret recipe so smaller retailers can compete against the very creator of that secret recipe. This is not fair.

Indeed, in my discussions with multiple non-dealer repair shops, I have learned that in addition to already having access to necessary information online, often a simple call to the local dealer's parts and repair shop usually leads to a complete explanation of the necessary work to be done. The fact is that this legislation is described by many in the industry as a solution looking for a problem that does not now exist.

There is no doubt that should a voluntary framework fall short in Canada, we can then take the necessary steps to implement the requirements set out in the legislation before us today. However, we have the benefit of a successful voluntary framework project at work in our neighbour to the south. We can look to this model to guide us in developing a voluntary initiative in Canada.

I am not saying third-party repair shops should be denied access to required information. I ask this House, however, to look to the leadership and competence of the industry, and support a voluntary system for the dissemination of repair and diagnostic information rather than the proposal put forward by Bill C-273.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois would like to see this bill go to committee to be thoroughly studied. First of all, this bill addresses a legitimate concern, namely, allowing motor vehicle owners to benefit from increased competition when they need to have their vehicle repaired.

However, before going ahead with such a measure, it is our responsibility to carefully weigh the repercussions, particularly on carmakers and dealerships. We therefore plan to ask representatives from car dealerships, manufacturers, independent repair facilities and consumers groups to testify before the committee during our study of the bill. The committee study will allow for a more thorough analysis of what is going on with vehicle repairs in Canada. Based on that analysis, we will be in a better position to make recommendations for the government to follow.

I think it is too early to express an opinion on the conclusions the committee will reach regarding this bill. However, we will ensure that the committee's study of this bill will favour the interests of consumers, while taking into account the concerns of the auto industry. Any amendments brought forward by the committee must be along those lines.

Auto mechanics has become quite a bit more sophisticated in recent years, and more and more servicing can be done electronically. Technicians must have access to the equipment and the codes they need to service and repair a car. Bill C-273 addresses this problem by providing that motor vehicle owners and repair facilities can have access to the information and diagnostic tools and capabilities necessary to diagnose, service and repair those motor vehicles.

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On the one hand, this bill could promote healthy competition in the automotive repair market, which in turn could make for a viable repair industry. The consumer would benefit in the end.

On the other hand, we are well aware of the negative impact such a measure could have on dealers as a result of the dramatic drop in new car sales. In addition, we will have to make sure that this bill will not curb innovation by threatening the provisions that apply to automakers' intellectual property.

In the interest of shedding light on these issues and getting an idea of the big picture, we have decided to support the bill at second reading, so that the committee can study it. However, as I said earlier, it is far too soon to venture to say what the committee's findings will be. One thing is sure: the Bloc Québécois will play an active role in the committee's consultations.

According to a recent study by the DesRosiers consulting firm, the number of vehicles and the concentration of automotive dealers are increasing in urban centres. Rural regions account for 21% of vehicles and only 12% of dealers. The committee study will therefore provide an opportunity to determine the extent to which controlling automotive repair technologies will affect the accessibility and competitiveness of regional vehicle repair facilities.

A number of years ago, the United States put in place a law establishing a right to repair similar to the one in the bill we are debating today. The U.S. has a voluntary system that anyone can use to access servicing and repair information, for a fee.

In Canada, service and repair technicians cannot consult this information. We want to know how adopting such a measure might affect the market and consumers in this country. But given the situation in the automotive market, we also need to hear from dealers, who derive nearly 30% of their profits from vehicle servicing and repairs, according to the DesRosiers consulting firm.

● (1115)

We have to consider the fact that, in Quebec, the vehicle maintenance sector is a \$3.5 billion business that contributes to the health of our economy and must be allowed to continue to prosper.

This is not a straightforward bill. On the one hand, we have mechanics, and on the other, manufacturers. We have to consider both parties. We all know what is going on with the auto sector these days, but consumers should not be the ones who have to pay the price at the end of the day. We have to find a solution together.

I think that sending this bill to committee will give us our best opportunity to hear from all of the witnesses—dealers, consumer advocates, manufacturers and mechanics. They will talk to us about their concerns and about what they think we should do with the bill. Listening to what they have to say is the best way to figure out how the government should change the bill, if necessary.

We should not come to any conclusions or favour one option over another before that. Making up our minds ahead of time would put us at a disadvantage. We should not make assumptions about what should be done with respect to mechanics or manufacturers. We should not make up our minds yet. We have to give the parties a chance to tell us what they think about this bill, what should be done with it, and we have to carefully consider all of the ins and outs.

I believe that the members of the House and the members of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology will send this bill to committee so that they can report on it. The members of the committee will approach the issue with clarity and a sense of cooperation. They will not take anything for granted. They will really think about what people have to say before coming to any conclusions.

● (1120)

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to offer support to my colleague from Windsor West who has put forward this bill.

This gives me a chance to take a trip down memory lane for the next few minutes. A lot of this is about dealerships doing work versus work being done outside the dealership network but still in the repair part of the economy.

Back in the day, a lot of years ago now, I worked at such a place, for International Harvester. It was a truck centre where we sold and repaired international trucks, not the farm equipment but the trucks. I was there for about 11 years before I was elected to Hamilton city council. I can speak with some authority in terms of the way it was and relate that to where things are going now. Back then there was a level playing field.

Let us keep in mind that at its core the member for Windsor West is trying to bring in a fair, rules-based system that treats everybody the same. Back in the day when I was on the shop floor, that is the way it was. There was no advanced technology. We were in the early stages of that when I left, which would have been in the mid-1980s. There was a level playing field. Nobody held any secrets. Nobody had any special tools that they were not giving to others. Software was not even in the vocabulary. Everyone had to compete on the same basis.

Much like today, all the warranty work was done at our shop. That was probably the biggest part of our work, as well as work on the big fleets that were willing to pay for the very best mechanics, and I might say, parts people. They did not want any problems. They wanted things to go as smoothly as possible. A corporation at that level wants things to go smoothly. Working with a dealership with a major infrastructure attached to the mother corporation was a great way to go.

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There were a lot of brokers and smaller trucking firms that would do their own work, or have it done by an offshoot of their company, or by someone such as a brother-in-law who ran a local garage, or Bill down on the corner who had been there for 30 years and treated everyone like family so people wanted to go there. People were able to save a few bucks, but they were not freebies or giveaways.

That was their choice, and that is the issue. To allow consumers and other after market repair businesses access to this material, the tools and the information takes us back to where we were before, which was that everybody was equal. It was business preference, productivity and efficiency that decided where people went, not whether or not they had the secret code.

They do not allow it in the United States, interestingly. It is done under the EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency. Why? Obviously the environment is so crucial now, or at least we have now woken up to how crucial it is. The last thing we want to do is take cars that are being designed to do less damage to the environment and repair them in a way that suddenly has them polluting. It does not make sense.

That seems to be what the EPA in the U.S. has said. The U.S. has that system. Why do we not? It denies consumers a choice. It is not as productive. It increases costs through lack of choice. It creates unfairness. Everyone attached to the automotive industry ought to be thanking the member for Windsor West for this bill.

I can appreciate there are some employees, as I was, who see the possibility that their work is going to go somewhere else, and they are fighting to retain it. Fair enough. That is the union's job. However, my experience was that allowing others to do the same work or at least to compete did not detract from that because we had so much extra to offer.

● (1125)

Other communities may argue, but I am sure the member for Windsor West would be proud to say he is from the automotive capital of Canada. We will give him that for the purposes of this bill. Let us remember that he represents a lot of the workers who are trying to protect the work they have in the current system. It would have been very easy for the member to stand in the tall grass on something like this if somebody else had brought it forward. Not only did he not do that, he was the one who brought it forward. He is doing it because he knows it is in the best interests of Canadians and he believes it is not going to do any damage to jobs that exist.

All it does is provide an unfair competitive advantage, almost a monopoly on some work by virtue of keeping secrets, which are not allowed to be kept in the country that is our biggest trading partner, the United States of America. The U.S. understands that Toyota, Honda and others ought not to be able to send their cars here and keep the secrets back home. That ought to apply whether it is a domestic or foreign automotive producer.

That is what this is about at its core. Again, it is about choice. It is about fairness. It is about making sure that Canadians have an opportunity to decide for themselves where they want to spend their money and where they want to get their vehicles repaired.

In bringing in Bill C-273, the member for Windsor West, in a large way, is doing every consumer in Canada a huge favour by removing

an unfairness, an imbalance that has now been created that did not exist before. It is part of going through the transition ultimately into the new digital economy. We need to keep an eye on it from a legislative point of view to ensure that these new technologies do not create an inherent unfairness. This is one of those times.

When the member for Windsor West saw what was happening and heard from his constituents and the tens of thousands of small automotive repair shops, 95% Canadian owned, all employing local people, he investigated and, as I said, in the face of a possibility of political backlash, he had the courage to bring it forward just because it is the right thing to do.

Many issues we deal with here are of utmost importance, and consumer protection is one of the most important. That is really what this is. It is not life and death. None of our kids are going to be facing critical health issues because of this. There is no pandemic attached to the bill, or those kinds of worries. However, protecting consumers is an important part of a legislative body's duty in a mature democracy. That is what this bill does.

I want to thank my colleague from Windsor West for bringing this bill forward and making things better for the Canadian people. I can only hope that the vast majority of parliamentarians will agree and at least allow us to get the bill to committee. Let us bring in the players and have a look at it. At the very least, let us do that.

I urge members to support this bill, at least at second reading, so we can look at it further.

Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a few moments to speak to Bill C-273, An Act to amend the Competition Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (right to repair).

This government takes private members' business seriously. In the case of Bill C-273, the spirit of the bill is in the right place and, for this reason, the government wishes to support it. The government will, however, be seeking amendments should the bill progress to committee stage.

Before I get into the details of some of the reasons that the government will be seeking amendments, I would like to acknowledge the work that the member for Windsor West has done on this bill.

I also would like to highlight some areas in which, I think, all parliamentarians can agree.

First, I am sure that all members of Parliament are concerned with the recent economic challenges and the effects of these challenges on Canadians and Canadian businesses. The government has acted quickly in addressing these concerns through the Budget Implementation Act.

Second, members opposite must recognize the government's commitment to protecting Canadians and businesses from crime, abuse and economic uncertainty through its ambitious legislative agenda. In these times of economic uncertainty, it is important for the government to act in a manner that directly addresses what is most important to people's lives and economic security.

Third, all members of the House were elected to represent our constituents' interests to the best of our ability. This does not mean that parliamentarians will always agree but I would hope that members opposite will accept my remarks today in that spirit.

Finally, I am sure that all members believe in supporting a competitive economy that benefits businesses and consumers. The government has been working hard to support Canadian businesses to be stable and more efficient.

Let us be clear on one thing: healthy competition is the best way of empowering consumers and that is what the Competition Act sets out to do.

When companies compete with one another for a consumer's dollar, it opens the door to lower prices, better services and wider product selection, all of which benefit consumers.

There are many who believe a voluntary system rather than a legislated approach to aftermarket issues would satisfy the needs of the Canadian aftermarket auto repair industry. There are benefits to establishing a voluntary system, aside from the obvious benefit of keeping government out of regulating how businesses run their affairs. A voluntary system would, for example, have the flexibility to evolve over time so it addresses changes in technology as they arise, which is one of the root causes of the aftermarket concerns.

With that in mind, in April of this year, the Minister of Industry sent a strongly worded letter to all automakers calling on them to develop a voluntary accord here in Canada. I am pleased to say that there has been progress. Representatives of the vehicle manufacturers and aftermarket industries met last month to begin discussions on the development of a voluntary accord. Most parties have signed on to a process and timeframe to draft this agreement.

One of the signatories is the National Automotive Trades Association, or NATA. NATA represents a large portion of the aftermarket repair shops across the country. It had this to say in a recent letter to its members and to the public:

NATA has publicly stated that in absence of a voluntary agreement it would participate in the legislative process. Now that we have a commitment from the Canadian auto manufacturers, we do not believe legislation is necessary.

I would like to more directly address some of the government's concerns with this private member's bill. The bill seeks to amend the Competition Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. I will be focusing my comments today on concerns raised by amending the Competition Act in the way that the bill proposes.

As members opposite know, the Competition Act is framework legislation, the enforcement of which has wide-ranging implications for the Canadian economy.

Even before the recent improvements contained in the Budget Implementation Act, the Competition Act was generally considered to be effective legislation.

● (1130)

Consultations on changes to the act have taken years to complete and have assisted the competition policy review panel in its assessment of Canada's competition and investment policies. This government has acted on the recommendations of the panel to ensure

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that the Competition Bureau has the tools it needs to continue to be effective in the years to come.

As all members of the House know, Bill C-273 proposes an amendment to section 75, refusal to deal, of the Competition Act by adding to the definition of product, for the purpose of that section, technical information that is required by a person in order to provide a service to a customer.

The member opposite may believe that this small change to the Competition Act will help to address the issues in the auto repair sector but this is not the case. This amendment to the Competition Act is problematic in at least two significant ways.

First, the amendment could have serious, unintended consequences. Bill C-273 has not been drafted in a way that applies only to the automotive industry to strictly address the right to repair issue. The proposed change to the definition of product could impact on all industries and all relevant bureau investigations under section 75. Such an amendment could raise questions regarding safety issues or intellectual property rights, which could cause other concerns that I do not intend to address today.

Second, amending the Competition Act to address the right to repair issue is not necessary. This issue can already be reviewed under section 75 or section 79, abuse of dominance, of the Competition Act. In the case of section 75, refusal to deal, if a party could establish that the inability to obtain the technical information was the result of another's refusal to provide a product as currently defined would satisfy the other elements of section 75. They would be able to address those concerns under the act.

Either the Competition Bureau or the affected party could make an application to the Competition Tribunal for a remedy. Another way to address this is that the bureau could make an application to the Competition Tribunal for a remedy if a party could establish that the refusal to supply the technical information was an anti-competitive practice and could establish the other elements of section 79, abuse of dominance.

Given the avenues already existing under the Competition Act to review the right to repair issue in the appropriate case and given the unintended consequences that could result from the proposed change to the definition of product, the government will be seeking to remove this Competition Act amendment during the committee stage.

We look forward to more debate on this issue and I am sure that all members will act in the best interests of their constituents.

● (1135)

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to discuss this important issue.

The automotive industry in North America is facing major challenges due to the worldwide economic downturn. The automotive sector is a key component of the Canadian economy. More than 2 million vehicles were assembled in Canada in 2008. The auto industry employed over 140,000 workers directly, with another 230,000 in the aftermarket sector. It also provided employment at more than 30,000 service and repair shops across the country.

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As for the aftermarket sector, according to data shared by automotive consultant, Dennis DesRosiers, the average age of vehicles on the road in 2008 was over eight years and it is estimated that over the course of a vehicle's life it will accumulate \$14,000 in aftermarket repairs and service. The demand for aftermarket services is forecast at \$19.2 billion in 2010.

The government agrees with the idea that all aftermarket service providers should have access to the diagnostic information on the fleet of vehicles on Canada's roads and highways. However, the way in which the bill attempts to achieve this is flawed in a number of ways, ranging from jurisdictional questions to the issues of intellectual property and vehicle security.

I want to reassure Canadians that the federal government is committed to fostering a fair, equitable and competitive marketplace, while balancing this with our duty to protect consumer interests.

I will jump right into the crux of the matter that has brought this proposed legislation before us. Independent aftermarket service providers want the manufacturers to provide them with the same information they provide their dealerships. They say that failure to do so threatens the long term competitiveness of the independents. On the other hand, many car makers tend to believe they already share the necessary information for their customers and legislating beyond this affects their dealer networks.

Dealers also have concerns about this issue. They believe that this information sharing will cut into their revenues. In fact, the Canadian Automobile Dealers Association, which represents some 3,500 dealers in Canada, opposes legislation on this issue.

The government is working overtime with the auto industry, affected provinces and related stakeholders. A thriving, successful auto industry in Canada means a thriving, successful parts industry and a thriving, successful aftermarket industry. We cannot have one without the other.

We will always have an auto aftermarket industry, even if the assembly business is scaled back. However, a healthy aftermarket starts with a healthy economy. The federal government has a broad approach to assisting the auto sector here in Canada that is built on four key measures: continuing to sustain a fiscal and economic framework that keeps the industry competitive; supporting an integrated North American auto sector; investing in automotive research; and investing through our new automotive innovation fund.

Through Advantage Canada, our long term economic plan and recent budgets, the government is promoting long term investment, innovation and job creation across all sectors of the Canadian economy, including the auto sector. The government has provided more than \$1 billion in tax relief for the automotive industry sector through lower federal corporate taxes and higher write-offs for investment in machinery and equipment.

In total, over the six-year period, including 2008-09, the government will have provided more than \$12 billion in tax relief to the manufacturing sector. In the recent economic action plan, the government extended the temporary 50% accelerated capital cost allowance rate. This applies to investments in manufacturing or processing machinery and equipment that are undertaken in 2010-11,

enabling manufacturers' investments in productivity-enhancing machinery and equipment.

Second, the government is supporting an integrated North American auto sector by increasing the compatibility of automotive regulations with the U.S. and continuing to improve border security and access. Improvements to the Windsor-Detroit crossing remain a priority, where 40% of Canada's commerce with the United States passes across a single, privately-owned bridge that was built in 1928. The goal is to have a new crossing by 2013.

Third, the government is investing in science and technology. Overall, Canada's economic action plan provides for more than \$1.5 billion toward science and technology initiatives.

● (1140)

The government is allocating \$200 million over two years to the National Research Council industrial research assistance program to enable it to temporarily expand its initiatives for small and medium size companies.

The government has already set aside \$34 million per year for new research through the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, targeting the needs of key industries, such as the auto sector.

In addition, \$23.2 million in federal support has been committed for the auto 21 network of centres of excellence in support of more than 260 researchers and 500 students working on 41 auto-related R and D projects.

Science research and experimental development tax incentive policies and procedures have also been aligned with current business practices to encourage even more business investment.

As a fourth pillar, the government established the \$250 million automotive innovation fund, supporting strategic, large scale R and D projects. The automotive innovation fund will help the auto industry retool for a new environmentally conscious fuel efficient age.

We have an integrated North American market and Americans have stopped buying cars. Some are deciding not to buy due to the slowdown in the U.S. economy. With credit markets frozen, those who do want to buy cars do not have access to competitive financing to purchase or lease vehicles, thus further reducing sales. This has led to a serious liquidity crisis for U.S. automakers.

Canada's economic action plan increases Canada's account limit from \$13 billion to \$20 billion to ensure the government has the capacity to directly provide credit and meet the financing requirements of business and strategic hard-hitting sectors of the Canadian economy.

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Canada's economic action plan has also committed the government to creating a \$12 billion Canadian secured credit facility to improve credit availability for consumers to purchase and lease new vehicles. This will help dealerships move cars off their lots and renew demand for the production of vehicles.

The Government of Canada has two established financing instruments that are available to the automotive sector, Export Development Canada, EDC, and the Business Development Bank of Canada, BDC. I would also like to add that both the federal and Ontario governments confirmed their overall commitment to ensuring the viability of the automotive industry by making up to \$4 billion in short-term interim loans available to both GM and Chrysler while they continue to restructure their long-term business plans.

Last week the governments of Canada and Ontario provided General Motors of Canada an interim loan of \$500 million. We also recently provided funding to Chrysler as part of the holistic approach we have adopted for the industry to enable it to restructure toward a viable, sustainable future. We asked for a significant commitment from all stakeholders, and we are pleased they made the tough decisions necessary to put the company on a more steady footing. A new restructuring plan, including new labour agreements with the CAW as well as completion of a deal with Fiat, gives us the assurances needed to commit taxpayer dollars to help Chrysler—

• (1145)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I am just questioning the relevance of the member's comments to Bill C-273.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): As the member for Windsor West knows, the Chair is in the habit of giving a great amount of leeway to members to talk about a piece of legislation. If the member will remember the piece of legislation that we are dealing with and keep his comments relevant, it would be appreciated. The hon. member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada also recently announced the Canadian warranty commitment program under which the federal government committed to honouring consumer warranties on new vehicles purchased from GMCL and Chrysler Canada Inc. for a limited time period while improved restructuring plans are put in place.

Budget 2009 included at least \$5 billion in new financing through EDC and BDC that aims to enhance cooperation with private sector financial institutions under the new business credit availability program. EDC has a number of services specifically designed for the auto sector, including financing and insurance capacity in that sector. As can clearly be seen, the federal government understands the urgency of the challenges facing the economy and the auto sector in particular.

In recognition of the auto sector's crucial importance in generating wealth for all Canadians, we need to stay the course and focus on the big picture, and not unnecessarily add further pressures to an industry fighting for its survival.

I would like to congratulate the hon. member for bringing forward the right to repair issue before the House. However, there is concern the bill has some fundamental legal and policy issues. I look forward to further discussion on how to address these issues going forward.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to add my comments to the debate on Bill C-273.

I might just say that with respect to the issue of relevance, I did a little research the last time I heard the Chair suggest that we give a lot of latitude. The relevance issue is there because the time of Parliament is very important and valuable and should be used for the purpose for which it is intended. That is why there is an order paper. It is really up to the members to keep relevant. Unfortunately, sometimes members like to push the envelope a little further. However, I think we had better ensure that the important points about a piece of legislation before the chamber are known to all members who are going to have to vote on it. It is actually a little more difficult now, given the recent developments within the auto industry, and that is what I want to talk about.

So that everybody knows what we are talking about on Bill C-273, the member for Windsor West has introduced a bill to amend the Competition Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. He had a bill in the last Parliament, and the bill is back now, and it has received a lot of attention. It is one of the reasons I wanted to speak to this. Auto repair shop owners in my riding of Mississauga South have spoken to me many times over the last number of years about this problem, that as the automobile technology changes, the normal work done by automotive repair shops that are not associated with a car manufacturer gets a little more difficult. They need the manuals to know how to work on the equipment they are going to deal with. They also need the diagnostic equipment, in some cases, and they need some of the specialty tools. Without those they cannot service the automobiles. If they cannot service the automobiles, repair shops will find themselves in jeopardy with regard to staying in business. That is their argument.

The other part of the equation is the automobile industry itself. The dealers are in the business of selling cars, but they are also in the business of servicing them. If they continue to provide the full cycle of maintenance and service for automobiles, that is good and healthy for the automobile business. The technology is amazing. A 10-year-old car, as I recall, pollutes 37 times more than one of the brand new cars. It is phenomenal. All of this is because of the changes in technology. It makes this debate and this bill more relevant because it has to do with the consumer, with small businesses and with big businesses and how the interests of those parties are reconciled.

In the last Parliament, the debate might have been different because the automobile industry was not in jeopardy. Now the automobile industry is in jeopardy. There is going to be a massive rationalization of the auto industry. There is going to be a massive rationalization of dealerships, of plants, of places for people to get their automobiles serviced. The neighbourhood auto repair shop may become much more important than it has been in the past simply because there are not going to be as many dealerships to go to anyway. The debate in the last Parliament would have been different from this one. Now we have to balance the interests.

Private Members' Business

I have often thought that the best arrangement for consumers is to ensure that there is healthy competition within the service and repair sector so that they can choose. That would help to keep the costs fair and reasonable. Right now there is not that choice to the same extent there would be if the independent repair shops had access to the information, the diagnostic equipment and the tools they need to properly and professionally repair the vehicles and to maintain them. It is a dilemma.

• (1150)

The industry in the United States adopted a voluntary agreement to provide, and the right to repair is the generic name. In the United States there has been a facility whereby shops can have access to this. It is done on a voluntary basis; it is not legislated. We are talking about a bill that wants to legislate it. It appears with all of the dynamics that have occurred in the auto sector with the rationalization and changes yet to come, the industry has reached some agreements with regard to voluntarily providing the information, tools and diagnostic equipment, although I do not know to what extent because I have not seen all the details.

This issue is evolving. I wanted to bring to the attention of the House that this matter seems to be fairly fluid. There is a lot going on. We do not have the latest information but I think it is important that this bill survive and that it go to committee so that we can get the representations from the auto industry as well as the after market businesses that provide services.

We have to look at the impact on people and their jobs. This is a very important aspect. We have to look at the other implications of competition law and the rights of a person, organization or legal entity. We have to look at the implication of that person, organization or legal entity being forced to release that information to another so another can take business away. This is a very interesting problem. There is a model in the United States which I think is useful to look at.

With only two hours of debate in private members' business it is very difficult for all of the information to get out. My recommendation to my colleagues is that the bill go to committee. I would like all of the information to be brought to the committee so it can study it carefully to determine whether or not the voluntary deal that is evolving and may be taking place in Canada is the best thing on behalf of all stakeholders, whether it be the industry, the after market suppliers and the consumers.

We want to make sure there is a balance. I think this is our opportunity to look into this because how we approach this problem probably will be the same way that we approach similar problems in other sectors.

Having said that, I congratulate the member for bringing the bill forward. I know the auto sector is very important in his riding and that it is a very difficult time for the auto sector. There is a great deal of work to do. This is part of it. Let us send this bill to committee.

• (1155)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank all members for participating in this debate at first and second readings and bringing their thoughts forward. It is an important part of what has happened.

This issue has been around for a number of years. In fact, I researched the bill for a couple of years, going across the country and having people looking at it. The former minister of industry is here today. He took an interest in it. I am sure if he would have remained as minister of industry, perhaps Bill C-273 would not have been necessary.

We are here today because there is a problem with our current system. If we continue to ignore it, it will affect the environment, consumer choice and public safety. Bill C-273 attempts to address that.

I want to touch upon a couple of things that are important and that have been part of the debate. There are voluntary agreements in the Canadian automotive industry right now, but they are still based on the Consumer Protection Act. This bill would specifically address the issue through government legislation.

We have to be clear. In the United States, under the EPA, because of its environmental laws, it created an operating agreement with the original manufacturers so there would be a clear definition. The United States legislation creates the operating agreement as a solution. It still needs to be some work on it because there are some issues with it, but at least it is available to the manufactures. Canada does not have a voluntary agreement or a legislative agreement.

I know NATA, the National Automotive Trades Association, has promised a solution, which is important to recognize. All it can do is promise it might have a voluntary agreement in 2010 at best. It is not worth the paper on which it is printed because, at the end of the day, there could be manufacturers that would opt in or opt out at different times and resolution processes would not be available through any type of legislation.

It is also very important not to forget that the automobile industry right now is revolutionizing in many respects. There will also be new entrants into the market. How can we have a voluntary agreement that would be based upon a group of businesses that are all foreign companies? They would have no Canadian legislative backstop to deal with any of the problems. There will be other ones, for example, China, as it emerges into the Canadian market with the Chery. China has over 100 different automotive assembly companies. Not all of them will get into our market, but some will and they could decide not to get into some type of agreement.

This dissipates the reality of having a rules-based system that is fair, open and transparent. The Competition Bureau would then be the arbitrator. The rules could be applied and there would be fairness. There is a whole process in place that could evolve.

That is why we want to get this to committee. We want to see Canadians have the same opportunity. It is important for Canadians to understand that, as things stand right now, they would be treated differently in the United States than in Canada. It is based on nothing more than the fact that it has chosen not to bring this forward to the Canadian public at this time.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

When we look at our Canadian technicians in the after-market, it is interesting to note that the men and women have the same training as those in the dealerships, unless they get additional training later on. They have to go through the same type of schooling. In fact, our standards in Canada are better.

Ironically, someone could take a trip to the United States, have something go wrong with the car and go to a facility to have it repaired by a technician with fewer qualifications than a technician in Canada. We are denied that because the proper programs cannot be downloaded or the schooling or training is not provided by the company.

This is not fair, nor is it healthy. One of the reasons we want to deal with this is it is good for the environment. We want to ensure that vehicles are clean and well maintained. It is good for public safety, that cars are fixed and in good operating condition, especially in rural communities where people have to drive hundreds of kilometres to get to an facility. It is also about the consumer's right to choose.

Therefore, we hope the bill will go to committee. I appreciate the fact that there has been a lot of input, both from those who have concerns about it and those who support it. I look forward to working with everyone to ensure we have a fair, rules-based system based on Canadian legislation to protect Canadians.

• (1200)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 12:02 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired. Therefore, the question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): When I called the vote, I could not hear a nay, but an hon. member has stated nay was said. I stand corrected. On that basis, I will call for yeas and nays on this matter.

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 yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 13, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

[English]

CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL LOANS ACT

Hon. John Baird (for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board) moved that Bill C-29, An Act to increase the availability of agricultural loans and to repeal the Farm Improvement Loans Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of the proposed amendments to the Farm Improvement and Marketing Cooperatives Loans Act. I am sure that my hon. colleagues will agree that they are solid, common sense measures and that the time has come to adopt them.

Important changes are taking place in the agricultural sector. The size of agricultural farms is increasing and it is becoming more difficult for a beginning farmer to obtain the funds required to set up a viable operation. About half of all farms, representing some \$123 billion in assets, are run by farmers who are 55 and older.

What will happen when these farmers want to retire? A good number of them will do so in the next 15 years.

• (1205)

[English]

Over the next 15 years, Canadian farmers, operating almost 84,000 farms, are expected to retire. I say "expected" because we know some will work beyond the age of 70.

In any case, we are talking about a major intergenerational challenge for Canadian agriculture that is going to play out over the coming years, a challenge to attract young farmers to the business, a challenge to transfer family farms to the next generation, a challenge to renew and rejuvenate the Canadian agriculture and agrifood sector and to put it on a sound footing for generations to come.

We need to attract young people to a future in farming. Young farmers are the foundation of Canada's agriculture and agrifood sector. They enrich and strengthen communities across Canada through their hard work and innovative spirit. They exemplify the entrepreneurial spirit that is critical to our success in the years to come. As entrepreneurs, young farmers want a government that gives their farm businesses room to grow and the tools to capture new opportunities.

I want to talk about a young farm family that is part of the next generation. Robert and Erin Brunel farm with Rob's dad, Paul, in Ste. Rose, Manitoba. R.P. Brunel Inc. is a fourth-generation family farm that specializes in grain. The Brunels farm 3,000 acres. Rob and his wife, Erin, welcomed their first child, Myley, in to the family in mid-November. Rob would like to continue to expand the business and eventually take over the farm completely from his father.

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The Brunels dream of a future in agriculture, but realizing that dream is much easier said than done. It is not uncommon for farms today to have assets of well over \$1 million, a considerable amount for the next generation to finance. Rob says that there are programs to help young farmers out there, but he does not qualify for many of them and they are not targeted to his specific needs. He would like a program to help him proceed with his expansion plans and eventually finance the farm transfer.

Farmers like the Brunels are the future of the sector and we need programs that will help them capture that future. That is the objective of the proposed legislation we are discussing today.

For the past 20 years, the Farm Improvement and Marketing Cooperatives Loans Act, commonly known as FIMCLA, has helped farmers and farmer-owned co-operatives improve and develop their businesses through government loan guarantees. Guaranteed loans of up to \$250,000 are available to farmers for up to 80% of the purchase price. The interest rate is capped. For co-operatives, the maximum loan is \$3 million.

Over the years, FIMCLA has been a valuable financial tool for farmers, helping them improve their farming operations when other sources of funding are not available or priced too high to make them viable.

[*Translation*]

Federal programs to help beginning farmers enter the agricultural sector have a number of restrictions. The advance payments program, governed by the Agricultural Marketing Products Act, only provides short-term financing to new farmers. Provincial programs for beginning farmers vary a great deal in terms of the types of programs and the amount of assistance provided.

Support for agricultural cooperatives is also limited. Debt financing provided by credit institutions to cooperatives is insufficient and provincial programs present the same problem. There is no doubt that the rules are not fair.

[*English*]

Consequently, in 2005 the previous government announced that it intended to cancel the program. The industry did not see this as a solution, and neither does this government. That is why we have pledged not only to maintain FIMCLA, but to consult on how to make it more responsive to the needs of farmers today. Therefore, we did that.

We heard from young farmers across Canada, farmers like the Brunels, who talked about the need for support for both beginning farmers and farm transfers. We also heard from co-operatives that told us about the challenges they had in raising the equity they needed to help farmers participate in value-added ventures.

I want to linger a moment on the topic of co-operatives. There is no question farmer owned co-operatives are a way to move farmers further up the value chain. In fact, in my riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell there is a very important agricultural co-operative known as St-Albert Cheese. Some farmers like the co-op approach. In fact, I have met with some in my riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

Co-ops have a record of providing benefits to farmers, improving their competitiveness, pooling risk, coordinating marketing and retaining local wealth and promoting rural sustainability through local ownership and control.

For example, Agropur, a Quebec-based dairy co-op, is one of the top dairy companies in Canada. Agropur reported revenues of \$2.3 billion and a surplus of over \$120 million last year, and it is owned by farmers. Across Canada, some 1,200 agriculture co-operatives generate annual revenues of \$13 billion and return over \$200 million back to their farmer members.

Like the farmers they serve, co-ops are evolving to take advantage of opportunities in the bio economy, to meet new consumer demands and to find new sources of capital and specialized expertise. This is more challenging than ever, given the high capital requirements of ventures like these.

We listened and we acted. The result is what we have before us today.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Before coming up with the amendments proposed in this bill, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada consulted widely with young farmers and financial institutions. According to stakeholders, changes to the Farm Improvement and Marketing Cooperatives Loans Act (FIMCLA) will be a great step forward.

The Canadian Young Farmers Forum is backing these recommendations. It has also insisted that the paperwork be simplified.

Accordingly, the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food will devise an electronic loans system under the amended FIMCLA in order to reduce processing times for loan applications.

[*English*]

Under the legislation we are proposing, FIMCLA, or the Farm Improvement and Marketing Cooperatives Loans Act, would be opened up to beginning farmers, to family farm transfers, and to a wider range of agricultural co-operatives.

For beginning farmers, the loan limit would be increased from 80% to 90% of the purchase price. We are proposing an increase in loan limits to \$500,000 for real property and \$350,000 for all other loan purposes. Loan guarantees would now be available on farm transfers through shares of a corporation or interest in a partnership.

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For co-operatives, this proposed legislation would respond to the co-op sector's needs by expanding eligibility requirements to include all agricultural co-operatives with a majority, 50% plus 1 of farm members. These measures respond to recent trends in co-op development by allowing non-farmer investment while at the same time retaining farmer control.

The proposed bill would also build in flexibility in the regulations so that loan limits can be changed as the need arises. We are not talking about just fine-tuning FIMCLA. We are talking about key improvements to the core program.

That is why we are proposing in the new bill that the program name be changed to the Canadian agricultural loans act. This is a better reflection of the proposed legislation's stronger national focus.

Opening up the program to beginning farmers, intergenerational farm transfers, and a broader range of agricultural co-operatives would create a national loan guarantee program that would support the entire agricultural community, and it would bring parity to the agricultural sector with other sectors of the economy which are entitled to benefit from small business financing programs.

This is a government that delivers for young farmers.

We have helped support family farm transfers by increasing the lifetime capital gains exemption from \$500,000 to \$750,000, the first increase in 20 years. To help farmers manage cashflow, we have doubled the amount of interest free money available through cash advance programs. This would make about \$600 million per year available to agricultural producers. We have delivered stable, predictable and bankable support for farm families.

We are working with provinces and industry to design programs under the growing forward framework to secure a profitable and vibrant agricultural sector for the next generation. This government supports strong, young farmer associations such as the Canadian 4-H Council, Canadian Young Farmers Forum, and Canada's outstanding young farmers.

I would like to quote briefly Doug Spencer, a dairy farmer from Campbellford, Ontario, because he touches on an important issue in the farming community right at the moment:

At the moment, the highest priority for my wife and me is to know that the business we've built up will be taken care of by the next generation, and this plan will help see to that.

The proposed amendments to FIMCLA will help farm families like the Spencers keep the farm in the family and help the older generation retire with dignity. It is good news for beginning farmers, for retiring farmers, for farmer-owned co-operatives, and for the whole sector.

The bill would provide fairness and parity with other businesses, both for beginning farmers and for farm families looking to transfer the business to the next generation.

It supports the next generation of farmers and agricultural co-operatives. It gets rid of some of the red tape and paperwork to make the program more accessible and more flexible to all farmers.

Farmers in my riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell represent the strong and vibrant agricultural community. They are in favour of

this type of legislation and of the increased access to credit that it affords them.

I highlight that we have introduced business risk management programs. We have invested in the agricultural sector and launched new initiatives to help our farmers across the country. The minister has been very busy, opening foreign markets once again to help our agricultural sector. We are taking real action to defend and promote the best interests of our farmers.

● (1215)

[*Translation*]

Farmers strongly support this bill and I invite members to support the changes we are proposing to the Farm Improvement and Marketing Cooperatives Loans Act.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to what the parliamentary secretary did not say, although we will be supporting this bill.

He used an example of a fourth generation farmer, where the bill will be helpful in terms of intergenerational transfers. That is true. It will help. However, the reality of today in the farming sector is that we are losing sixth generation farmers right across Canada, day after day, because of the inaction of the government. The government has a sound record of increasing farm debt. It has increased by a little over \$5 billion under its watch.

Will the parliamentary secretary just answer these two simple questions? What is this bill really about? It is not about providing money to farmers. It is about providing debt. Who is guaranteed under this bill? Is it not the banking sector? There is a 95% guarantee to the banks. Is that not correct, parliamentary secretary? When is the government going to actually deal with what the problem really is, which is sustainable farm income?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I want to recap some of the highlights of these wonderful initiatives for farmers. We are talking about taking the loan rate for beginning farmers from 80% to 90%, so that they can borrow up to 90% in order to allow for the transfer of farms among generations. This is good legislation for our farmers.

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If we could just have the cooperation of my colleagues in the opposition, this bill could be moved through the House and implemented before the summer. This is exactly the kind of programming that our farmers are looking for. When I am in my riding, they talk about difficulty with access to credit. They have very real bills to pay. When they want to save their family farm and move it from an older generation to a younger generation, access to credit is a very real concern.

This is the type of legislation that they have been asking for. I have not even touched on co-operatives here. We have worked very closely with co-operatives and they want greater access to credit as well. That is what we are offering here. I would invite my colleague to support this legislation and its rapid implementation.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that the Bloc Québécois plans to support this bill.

However, following the parliamentary secretary's speech, a few questions came to mind, especially when he said that young farmers all across Canada were consulted. He even referred to a young farmers' organization that fully supported this bill. I would remind the House that consultations did take place here and there across Canada. Consultations were held in Longueuil, Quebec, over the holidays from July 18 to August 11, 2006. I would like some clarification, however, from the parliamentary secretary. I looked carefully through the department's documents—and I have the consultation paper here—but I do not see the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec anywhere among those invited to the consultation in Longueuil. If it was invited, it did not attend. One thing is certain: I spoke to the president of that federation last week, and he said he was not consulted. He even issued a press release on the matter, saying that the bill looked promising, but he would have liked to have been consulted.

How is it that this government can pride itself on doing a lot of consultation? If they did the same thing as with the "Product of Canada" label, the consultation was completely inconclusive. In fact, neither the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec, nor the Coopérative fédérée, nor the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec were included in that consultation in Longueuil. I would like the parliamentary secretary to give us some details about that so-called consultation. It appears that some people were missing.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that consultations are very important. We worked very hard as a government to consult extensively right across Canada. It is not always possible to hear from all the cooperatives or associations when we hold a consultation in a particular location, but our doors are certainly always open. I am always available to our farmers, our cooperatives and our associations, and the minister is as well, both here in Ottawa and across the country. Letters and other forms of communication are also very important.

We consulted extensively, and we are delivering the results today with our bill. I am very happy to have the support of the Bloc Québécois, because we will need the support of every party here to make sure that the bill is implemented as soon as possible.

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for his involvement around the country. As many of us know, he and the minister have been spending a fair bit of time talking to farmers on the back roads to find out what their issues are.

I have always found it interesting that the member for Malpeque is always so negative about farmers while this party quite honestly has done so much, from increasing the capital gains to the advance payment increases.

My question for the parliamentary secretary is this. There has been great support for the bill. We have talked to the Canadian Young Farmers Forum. However, when the parliamentary secretary has been crossing the country and talking to the ordinary farmers, has this been one of their priorities or is it just one of those other issues that they want to talk about?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, my colleague raises an excellent point. Is this a priority for farmers? It certainly is a priority for farmers.

The future of farming is a huge concern for our farmers all across Canada. The member quite rightly pointed out that both the minister and I have been travelling across Canada meeting with farmers from all the different agricultural commodities to talk about the future of farming and the challenges they face today and the challenges that they will be facing in the future.

Many farmers operate family farms and they feel that their family farms are at risk. One of the challenges they face is the younger generation having access to enough capital in order to acquire the family farm. This is exactly what this legislation is aimed at. We are talking about increasing loan limits from \$250,000 to an aggregate of \$500,000.

As I mentioned before, we want to increase the loan rate for beginning farmers from 80% to 90%. This makes a big difference. For example, if a farm operation has an inherent value of one million dollars, a new farmer under the legislation as it exists today would have to borrow up to \$800,000. He would still have to come up \$200,000 himself. However, once this legislation passes, he would only need to have \$100,000. We are going to be halving the amount of money that he would have to put forward to acquire a farm from another family member.

Once again, the co-operatives play such an instrumental role in the health and vitality of our agricultural sector. We have worked with co-operatives and co-operatives want greater accessibility to this type of financial resource that we are presenting here today.

Therefore, once again, I urge my colleagues in the opposition parties to join with me in voting for the rapid acceleration of this proposed legislation through the House for the benefit of our farmers.

Government Orders

• (1225)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a co-operative abattoir that is set up in my region. The experience that it has had over the last couple of years in setting up is that the federal government puts a lot of regulations in place but does not actually show up to support the cost that is incurred by those regulations.

I wonder if Bill C-29 would actually help address the shortfall in money that happens for a lot of these smaller abattoirs that are co-operatively run, farmer-owned, and assist them in getting the product out the door and help sustain our farming community?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight that we want to see our agricultural co-operatives succeed. By putting in place measures like the ones that we are proposing today will help the co-operatives. It will help that sector of the agricultural community to thrive. Giving them more access to credit will only help them move forward.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am indeed pleased to speak on Bill C-29. During my remarks, I hope to explain the benefits of Bill C-29 and why the Liberal Party will support a quick passage of this bill. We in fact are willing to pass it through all stages and get it to the Senate so that it can be dealt with quickly and kick into gear, because the bill has been very late coming.

However, it is also critically important for the Conservative government to actually bring forward immediate measures that would deal with the income loss problems of primary producers.

I will outline those areas and propose some solutions.

The reality is that the minister talks, as the parliamentary secretary did in his remarks, of putting farmers first. However, when we drill down into the minister's record, it is nothing but a record of failure. The bill, in its final analysis, would add to what the government has been most successful at doing; that is, increasing farm debt.

Since the Conservative government has taken office, farm debt has increased by \$5.1 billion and now stands at \$54 billion, four times higher than that of the United States' farmers.

Worse, in recent years, this debt has not been for new technologies or new investments, in the main, but much of it has been for primary producers borrowing more money or gaining advance payments program money loans in the hog and beef sector just for their very economic survival. In the agricultural industry in this country, some commodities are in serious trouble.

So let us be clear. While the bill would provide availability of credit to farmers, it is not designed only for the interests of the farming community. It is designed, in its final analysis, to guarantee the banks 95% protection on the money they have lent.

In fact, if we look at the Prime Minister's announcement, he states that he will bring forward new legislation to guarantee an estimated \$1 billion in loans over the next five years to Canadian farm families and co-operatives.

So let us be clear. The Prime Minister did everything he could in the announcement to make it look like he was providing \$1 billion. He is not providing \$1 billion. It is loans that are coming from the lending community, and the Government of Canada, through this

legislation, is guaranteeing the lenders 95% security on those moneys.

The real problem in the farm sector is price, stability of income; and that, the government fails to address. I want to be very clear on that. Adding debt, then, will just not do it. Farmers' real challenge is sustainable farm income, and I will come back to that serious issue in a moment.

Bill C-29, then, really is about amendments, as the parliamentary secretary said, and it would provide a new loan guarantee program for these areas. Farmers would be eligible for new loan limits of up to \$500,000 for the purchase of real property, and \$350,000 for all other loan purposes. New farmers and producers taking over the family farm would be eligible for loans. They are not currently eligible under the current legislation, and I think that is important for intergenerational transfer.

However, keep in mind, the big issue on intergenerational transfer and why in my question earlier I talked about farms stopping at the sixth generation is not just access to credit. The fact of the matter is they cannot balance their balance sheets economically under the current pricing regime, and the government is absolutely nowhere to be found. We are losing some industries in this country.

• (1230)

As well, as the parliamentary secretary said, agriculture cooperatives, including now the ones with a majority of farmer members, 50% plus one, would be eligible for loans up to \$3 million for the processing, distribution or marketing of farm products. But that is an important point in itself. It used to be that we had 100% farm members. Now we are dropping to 50% plus one. That tells us that there is a serious problem in rural Canada in that the assets are no longer there for the farmers themselves to provide the asset base and the stability for those cooperatives, and we have to go to others in the community. That is a sad commentary, because farmers themselves need to have the asset base and the net worth to be able to provide for cooperatives in this country, which is a good system. A new online system would improve the delivery of the program, and we certainly agree with that.

However, again, I must mention, the bill provides far more guarantees for banks than it does for farmers, which speaks to the government record in increasing farm debt. Farm debt has skyrocketed to over \$55 billion today. The real challenge facing farmers is sustainable farm incomes. The Conservatives have a long list of broken promises with regard to support for farmers.

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While we can support the changes in Bill C-29 to better reflect the size of today's farms, we should not let the Conservatives forget the list of Conservative failures to help improve farm income. They promised hundreds of millions of dollars and raised the hopes of farm families, but then consistently failed to deliver on those promises.

In March 2007, the Prime Minister himself announced \$100 million per year to farm families to address rising "cost of production issues". That plan was cancelled in the 2009 budget before it was ever implemented.

Also in 2007, the Prime Minister announced AgriInvest, a new savings program to help farmers manage business risks. The Prime Minister touted this initiative as "programming that is more predictable, bankable and better enables farmers to better respond to rising costs". Two years later, it still has not been implemented. I remind the parliamentary secretary, because he used those words of predictability in his remarks, it only works if farmers have income that they can put into the investment and the government is failing to assist in terms of that level of income.

In November 2007, the minister committed \$6 million to strengthen value-added processing in Atlantic Canada to help struggling beef and hog farmers there. Now, a year and a half later, this money has not been provided and we find out that it is also a loan, more lending, more credit, not income.

During the 2008 election campaign the Prime Minister committed \$500 million over four years to create an agricultural flexibility program, to help farmers build flexible programs to meet their local needs, but once re-elected, the government broke its promise again and announced a program of less dollars that could not be used for flexible programming. In reality, it was only \$190 million over five years and was not allowed to be used for RMP in Ontario or ASRA in Quebec.

In budget 2009, the Minister of Finance announced a new \$50 million investment in processing capacity for livestock producers. Then, four months later, it changed into a loan program, far from what cattle farmers were led to believe.

By golly, Mr. Speaker, I almost forgot, do you remember when the previous minister announced the farm families options program, targeted to low-income farm families? After one year of a two-year commitment, it was cancelled in midstream.

• (1235)

That cancellation virtually robbed farm families of \$246 million, money they had counted on. So much for the Conservative government putting farmers first. The fact of the matter is that what the Conservative government has done has increased debt and added to the farm community's financial instability.

Allow me to turn to some of the specific commodities, and I will make a few comments.

In P.E.I., the government's lack of action has caused, to a great extent, the loss of the hog industry. Roughly 80% of that industry has now gone in the last 18 months, and P.E.I. has lost its only hog slaughter plant. If the minister does not soon deal with assisting the regional issue of pork production and the one slaughter plant that

remains in Atlantic Canada, then we could in fact lose the total regional industry. There are only four producers left in the province of Nova Scotia.

So I ask the minister to start to deal with the issue at the farm income level. There are several things that the minister could do. Certainly the minister has to come in with a major payment for the pork industry in this country, which is finding itself in financial distress, and nothing less than \$1 billion in an ad hoc payment will save this industry.

The Canadian government must stand up for Canadian producers, must challenge the U.S. in terms of the country of origin legislation and ensure not more debt but that the cash is there to assist in the survival of this industry.

I would add a note of caution. If government does introduce an ad hoc payment, then it needs to be a total package. Number one, we need the ad hoc payment.

Number two, the severe economic hardship moneys that were advanced last year, which are now loans, were put in place not to provide income but to allow debt servicing so that farmers could maintain a credit line. Those severe economic hardship moneys must be extended out, not just using an ad hoc payment to pay off that debt, but that a new ad hoc payment can come in so that producers can use that for working capital they direly need.

As well, the beef industry is in serious trouble. Instead of dealing with the problems they have in that industry, the Government of Canada set up a system where they can acquire more debt. That is not what they need to do. I would suggest that what the government needs to do in this case is allow the current safety net program to work. First, eliminate the viability test; and second, allow producers the better of the Olympic or previous three years' average for reference margin calculations so that they can trigger the current program.

Regarding the current safety net program, if we remember back in the 2006 election, the Prime Minister said he was going to cancel the CAIS program. What did he do? He changed the name. In fact, the new AgriStability program is even worse than the old CAIS program in times of economic difficulty.

The suggestions I am putting forward for the beef and hog industries would allow the program to work for those industries. They cannot access the safety net programs now because the reference margins are not there. What I am proposing today is a simple solution so that the minister could allow the safety net programs to do what they were designed to do and allow hog and beef producers in my province of Prince Edward Island and across the country to be able to trigger a payment they direly need.

A similar situation exists actually in the potato and root crop industry in my own province of Prince Edward Island.

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• (1240)

Last year, as the minister knows, there was a lot of weather damaged crop, which triggered the new agrirecovery program. The problem is that agrirecovery, although the government talks about it as a disaster program, does not work as a disaster program. The minister promised \$12 million but only around \$3 million was spent and that money was only allowed to be spent to assist in the costs of disposal of the crop, whether it was in the warehouse or in the field.

I have two neighbours in my home province of Prince Edward Island who are not planting this year because of the disaster caused by weather conditions. The government's program leaves them out in the cold and does not assist them. It costs \$2,800 to \$2,900 to grow an acre of crop. The agrirecovery program gave them \$200 and it cost them \$200 to dispose of the crop. That program is not working. What I would suggest to the government in that case is similar to what I suggested in terms of beef and hogs. The government should allow the agristability program to once again work. It should cut out that bad year and go back to the other years to get reference margins so that producers could at least trigger a payment.

I have two more points on the potato industry that I should make relative to Prince Edward Island. The government should not allow the disaster year to be counted in their production history. It is an event beyond producers' control. Weather crop loss is an act of nature. If it is kept simple and that year is not be counted in the production history, the producer would be more likely able to trigger a payment. The potato industry in P.E.I. and the other root crop industries really need a stay of default on the advance payment program so they can trigger that program again in order to have the working capital to put in a crop.

That is what is direly needed in this industry. Whether it is in hogs and beef, there are potential solutions. Credit is not the only thing that needs to be talked about. It is the same thing in the potato industry. Farmers need income and they need cash to do what needs to be done.

Again going to the record of failure, the government has been responsible for the loss of more slaughter capacity and value-added production in this industry than any other government in Canadian history. I will run through a list: two Maple Leaf Foods plants in Winnipeg and Saskatoon; two Olymel plants in Saint-Valérien-de-Milton and Saint-Simon-de-Bagot in Quebec; one Qualiporc Regroupement Coopératif plant in Les Cèdres, Quebec; and one Natural and Organic Food Group plant in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.

CanFax Packers directory reported that out of 33 federally inspected slaughterhouses in January 2006, only 26 plants remained in January 2009. Among those that closed down were Blue Mountain in British Columbia, Rancher's Beef in Alberta, Natural Valley Foods in Saskatchewan, Gencor Foods in Ontario and Abattoirs Zénon Billette in Quebec.

My point is that the record of the government is one of failure. While the bill today is needed in terms of advancing available credit, it ties into the record that the only thing the government has been successful at is increasing debt and as a result our industry is in trouble. The government must seriously address within days making

sustainability a firm income sustainable and that way producers would be able to pay back the debt and not just get additional loans.

• (1245)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague with close interest and what a confused speech. His opening position was that he supports our changes to FIMCLA, as he should. We are talking about increasing the amount of government-backed loans to farmers from \$71 million to \$292 million, which is great news for farmers. We are also talking about increasing access to capital for our co-operatives.

However, he then went on for the next 20 minutes with a litany of complaints and negative comments. We are trying to provide increased access to credit for farmers so they can buy the next generation of farms and keep the farms in the family, and he comes up with this wild theory that we are doing this for the credit of the banks. Who would believe that? It is certainly not the farmers with whom we consulted.

Can my colleague not just admit that this is good legislation for our farmers? Will he not just stand in his place and say that this is good and he is for it?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, as I said in the beginning, we will support this legislation but the policy of the government is anything but good. It needs to be put it into context.

I asked the parliamentary secretary a question previously and I will ask him again. I may even get an opportunity before we are done to ask him a third time. Will he just stand in his place and admit that what Bill C-29 would do is guarantee the lending community, on the additional billion dollars of credit availability, that it is backed up at 95% to the lenders? Will he just stand in his place and admit that this bill is for the protection of the banks? If we are going to protect farmers in this country, we should protect and add to sustainable farm income. The government has failed to do that.

I had to go through a litany because there is no government in Canadian history with such a dismal record, a record of failure that fails to deliver income to producers. The bottom line is that it has increased the debt of farmers by \$5 billion and we have lost 3,500 farmers a year. Can the parliamentary secretary stand and say he is proud of that? I would hope not.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his speech the member for Malpeque raised a problem, or at least a concern, regarding the potential excessive debt of those who will obtain new loan guaranties, particularly new farmers.

Earlier, I was asking the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture about the famous consultation paper that I have here. I mentioned that several groups of young farmers unfortunately were not consulted before amendments were proposed to this law.

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However, some participants [among those consulted] said there is a need to ensure beginning producers [the next generation of farmers] do not overextend themselves financially by using the program, which they said may occur if it encourages beginning producers to borrow larger amounts than they can manage to pay back. In the end, participants agreed on the need to support beginning producers and the importance of minimizing road blocks to participation in the industry...

To date, the government has not established a real policy to help the agricultural sector as a whole. It has presented certain ideas that may be of interest but it has not shown the real political will to help the next generation of farmers or farmers in general. Does the member for Malpeque believe that we run the risk of having farmers take on excessive debt, which would lead to other problems?

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, it is a sad commentary on the government when its consultation process leaves out some of the most important players in the industry. The government claims that its bill was designed for intergenerational transfer and for bringing young farmers into the industry but, as is usual, its consultation process leaves much to be desired.

The government is well-known in a wide range of circles for consulting with its friends. We saw that with the Canadian Wheat Board where it did not consult with the general population. It forgot that there is a government for all Canadians. It thinks it can govern basically for the right wing.

The member's question is a valid one and it is one of our concerns. We do not believe that just providing more credit and establishing more debt will bring young people into the industry. Farmers need to have income stability and some security in the future that they will be able to pay the bills, earn an income and provide for their family and the community. In other words, there needs to be economic prosperity at the farm gate level in rural Canadian and that is where the government has seriously failed to address the problem.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the need to support farmers of all ages, what are my colleague's views on the government's conduct with respect to the Canadian Wheat Board?

The Canadian Wheat Board is an important institution not only for the farming communities in the region I represent, but also because of the traffic it brings to the Port of Churchill.

Grave concern has been expressed to me by members of the Canadian Wheat Board and farmers in my area who depend on the Wheat Board for the important work it does. I would like to hear his thoughts on this as well.

• (1255)

Mr. Bev Shipley: We want an unbiased opinion.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I will gladly answer that question. I can hear calls from members on the government benches, as if that is not a legitimate question. It is a very legitimate question because the Canadian Wheat Board, as a marketing institution, goes to the very core of assisting farmers in maximizing their returns in the international marketplace.

Between the two ministers of agriculture under the Conservative government, instead of addressing the farm income and sustainable income issues of all farmers across Canada, they spent a phenomenal amount of time doing nothing but attacking the Canadian Wheat

Board, which provides income stability. The government was stopped twice in the courts. We have had several resolutions in the House to try to stop the government but the Prime Minister ignored them, which is his way.

In the last Canadian Wheat Board director elections, farmers sent the government a clear message by electing 80% of those directors as pro-single desk sellers. In other words, they supported the Canadian Wheat Board. The Government of Canada has been found wanting in its attack on the Wheat Board. We on this side of the House strongly support it.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about farming and debt but I wonder if he has looked at the financial situation of Canadian farmers in 2009.

Rather than just talking about debt, it is more important to talk about debt to asset ratio, which has risen over the last 10 years by three-quarters of 1%. All of us have incurred debt over the last number of years but inflation and the cost of living has driven some of that.

I wonder if the member has ever looked at the debt to asset ratio which is really the important factor in terms of assessing the debt of farmers.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, yes, I have. We are talking about how figures can be misleading when we look at them year over year. We have to look at net farm income.

Net worth on paper does not mean much if people cannot put food on the table. If I were to put it on a graph, net income in this country has continually been going down and down. We have lost 3,500 farmers per year. The hog and beef industries are in serious trouble. Potato and carrot producers on Prince Edward Island are in trouble. At the end of the day, they need net returns that are in the black. That is what they need if we are going to have economic prosperity.

I would ask the member to think about that and encourage his government to deal with farm income, not just add debt to the pile.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to take part in the debate on Bill C-29 to amend the Farm Improvement and Marketing Cooperatives Loans Act.

The Bloc Québécois supports this bill. However, even though the government members might not be happy about this, we will raise some concerns and issues that could have been resolved through this legislation or other programs. Some questions must be asked. Nevertheless, this bill does include some positive elements, and we do not intend to stand in the government's way, because we would like this bill to move forward quickly.

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That being said, I want to point out that the government does not seem to learn from experience. As I have said before, this government is all about marketing. It makes wonderful promises and big announcements in perfectly planned settings, but afterward it becomes clear that the government is trying to force something on us and that the promises look different on paper.

For example, just before the most recent budget was tabled, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food made a big to-do about finally bringing in a truly flexible program. As we all know, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture had proposed a program called AgriFlex.

The minister said that he would invest \$500 million in the program, just as the producers wanted. The program that turned up in the budget had nothing to do with what producers wanted, and risk management was left out. Also, instead of \$500 million over four years, the government promised \$500 million over five years.

The worst part is that the provinces do not have the flexibility they need to implement their own programs. In other words, the provinces do not have the flexibility they need to funnel that money into the programs that they have already set up. As it turns out, the announcement was not so wonderful after all.

There is also the issue of the “Product of Canada” label. Earlier, I talked about the consultations that were announced with great fanfare by the government on every issue. The principle is the same. The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food discussed changing the totally obsolete rule for “Product of Canada” labels. I am going to explain this rule, even though it is very well known. Under that rule a food product could be labelled a “Product of Canada”, provided that at least 51% of its total cost was Canadian.

That aberration was obvious when we would see the “Product of Canada” label on a jar of olives, because the jar, the lid and the liquid were Canadian, but the olives obviously could not have come from Canada or Quebec. We have yet to see olives grow in any part of Canada, whether it is Prince Edward Island, Vancouver, Quebec or Ontario. Therefore, the legislation had to be amended, so that consumers would know that they were buying a food product that was really produced here, that really came from here.

So, the committee's consultations were going well, until the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced, on a farm located in the pastoral setting that I described earlier, that they were changing the regulations on “Product of Canada” labelling, and that this issue would be settled.

As for us, we had not even finished our work, we were still consulting people. Thus, they proposed a standard that Conservative members on the committee had never told us about, namely the 98% rule for obtaining the “Product of Canada” label. This has the reverse effect of the infamous 51% of the total cost rule. Before, anything could be called a “Product of Canada”, but now it is nearly impossible for a product to get that label. It seems that the government has not learned from its mistakes.

The member for Malpeque also referred to the options program, which had also been announced with great fanfare. The idea was to help the neediest agricultural producers but now, two years later, we

realize that the program is not working very well and is not really adequate.

• (1300)

As we said before, it is hard to be against this. Helping the poorest farmers is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is not at all what farmers wanted. The government decided to drop the program simply because it was not working. Insofar as consultations are concerned, I wonder where the government went in order to realize that these changes were not wanted. It sure laid an egg with this program, which no longer exists.

The purpose of Bill C-29 is to increase the availability of loans to help farmers get established or to develop and improve their farms, including through the processing, distribution and marketing of farm products. We will therefore vote for this bill. The government will make loans more available by providing loan guarantees at designated financial institutions.

The Bloc Québécois wants to remind the House that farmers often find themselves in a precarious situation as a result of the decline in farm income, the economic crisis and all the various problems that have affected agriculture. The government should not use this bill, however, as an excuse for not taking other measures that should be implemented to help various agricultural sectors deal with the crisis facing them.

We are also concerned about the latitude the government has given itself by retaining the right to change the process and criteria by regulation. If the minister is given broad discretionary powers, we may be left with terms and conditions that make particular programs available in theory but the minister has the power to block it all. I will provide examples later if time permits.

The amendments to the current act will ensure that beginning farmers—the next generation therefore—are included in the definition of a farmer, and that is a good thing. The amendments will also extend eligibility to farm product cooperatives whose members are at least 50% + 1 farmers, instead of requiring all members to be farmers, as was previously the case. In addition, the bill increases the availability of loans by including in the definition of a lender other designated organizations.

The bill also amends the current legislation regarding the percentage of a lender's loss that can be reimbursed for loans to farmers that are guaranteed by the government. This provision provides compensation of as much as 95% of the losses suffered, unless a lesser percentage has been fixed by the regulations. This is an example of the minister's discretionary power. It is the same in clause 4(2)(c), where the government reserves the right to add various kinds of livestock to the program or eliminate them from it.

The bill also makes it possible to use the loan to buy land and not just new land, as was previously the case. This small but important adjustment makes it possible to use the loan to buy shares in a corporation or membership in a cooperative and allows for intergenerational farm transfers, instead of limiting it to the purchase of new farm land.

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As for the famous consultations with stakeholders, I saw the document the government released. It is available on the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada website. The government did hold consultations across Canada. In Quebec, they took place in Longueuil. To my great surprise, the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec, the Coop fédérée and the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec were not present at this consultation.

This makes me wonder whether the government was truly committed to consulting the people directly affected by such measures. Many people from the banks were present. Earlier, the member for Malpeque explained that rather than being designed to really help young farmers and producers, the bill was designed to help the banks and guarantee the credit they would then give to producers and young farmers.

I also spoke to Frédéric Marcoux, the president of the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec who said he was nonetheless “enthusiastic about the political will to support beginning farmers, which the federal government eventually affirms”.

● (1305)

It is important to quote the federation's press release, which says:

However the Federation regrets that the young farmers were not previously consulted and would like to know more into details the ins and outs of the program, before giving a more precise opinion...the loan insurance problem is not the main difficulty for the youth who wish to start in agriculture.

The federation president stated:

“It would be good to involve us much more in the thinking process engaged by the federal government, a preliminary diagnosis of the situation of the establishment in agriculture in Canada would be a good basis to then propose suitable and efficient measures.”

We can see that young people are very aware of what they need and want and that they did not feel at all involved in the government's decision to introduce such a measure. They did not feel that they had been listened to. The Minister of State for Agriculture is a member from Quebec, and every time questions are put to him, he answers that he is listening carefully and that he is very open. I have rarely seen a minister with such large ears. But I think that he is not listening to the same people we are. What we are wondering is: whom is he listening to? Whom is he consulting?

Earlier I referred to the example of the “Product of Canada” label. That is a perfect example. One might wonder where the minister was, or where the Prime Minister was. Where were those individuals when everyone agreed that 98% was completely unacceptable? Yet the minister says he is listening. It appears he did not listen to the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec, since it was not even invited to the famous consultation that took place in Longueuil.

In Canada, I found only one location, Newfoundland, where young farmers were in fact represented. I must admit, somewhere in Canada, one person spoke on behalf of young farmers. That was in Newfoundland. Everywhere else, there was not one representative of young farmers in attendance at those consultations. That is simply not enough.

As for the positive aspects, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, whose new president is Laurent Pellerin, commended these measures, which will give farmers a boost. Mr. Pellerin said

that young farmers and cooperatives are a vital part of the agriculture sector, and that the proposed changes could be helpful in that regard.

The Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec also pointed out that Quebec is losing more than one farm per day and that the problem must be addressed through fiscal measures, in order to preserve existing farms and keep them from going under. It said that the government must take these factors into consideration if it wants to help young farmers and that, more than ever, the problems facing the next generation of farmers must be at the heart of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's concerns.

Unfortunately, young farmers gave their opinion after the fact. It would have been better if the government had heard from young farmers before Bill C-29 was drafted.

We are talking about consultations and listening to stakeholders. It is no surprise that the Bloc Québécois is always ahead in Quebec. The reason is simple: we really go out and meet people, and hear what they have to say. That is what we did with young farmers.

In January 2005, the Bloc Québécois organized a conference called “Vers un transfert de fermes gagnant”. The Union des producteurs agricoles took part, as well as the Bloc québécois and the Syndicat de la relève agricole de la Côte-du-Sud. The conclusion we reached was that several tax measures could be taken to help the next generation of farmers. If the government is really serious about helping the next generation and establishing winning conditions, if I may use that term, to ensure that the farm sector survives, it should listen to the proposals that came out of our 2005 conference.

That is not all the Bloc did. On several occasions, it put forward motions proposing these ideas. I managed in committee to have them included in the recommendations made in various files in order to ensure that the government knew that some very effective measures could be taken.

● (1310)

In order to make it more attractive to transfer farms rather than dismantle them, the Bloc Québécois suggested in particular that the capital gains deduction on agricultural property should be increased from \$500,000 to \$1 million. A change was made and the amount is now \$750,000, although this could be increased to \$1 million solely in the case of transactions which result in the farm being maintained.

We also suggested the government should extend the rollover provision to other transfers beyond parent-child. We said it should be extended to other immediate family members less than 40 years of age. It could be brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, grandparents, grandchildren, and so forth. It is good for farms to stay in the immediate family, but we should not prevent them from being transferred outside the parent-child relationship. It would be very easy to expand this and make it easier to hand down farm assets.

We also proposed a farm transfer savings plan that would enable farmers to accumulate a non-taxable retirement fund. Governments could also contribute, as they do in the case of the education savings plan. This contribution would be conditional on the farm being preserved after the transfer.

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We also suggested that the government make the home buyers' plan more flexible to allow young farmers to obtain, in whole or in part, a larger portion of a residence owned by a corporation and to use their RRSP to acquire an agricultural business. Currently, the home buyers' plan, also known as the HBP, allows individuals to use their RRSP to purchase a residence. The next generation of farmers has asked us to propose two measures to make the home buyers' plan more flexible so that they can acquire a farm, not just a residence, for the purpose of becoming a co-owner of the family farm, not just a homeowner.

This proposal comes directly from those representing the next generation, those who know what they need. After plenty of proper consultation, we think that the government could easily implement these measures. It would have been nice if some parties other than the Bloc Québécois had made similar proposals during the election campaign.

We also proposed that the federal government transfer a recurring envelope of funds to the Government of Quebec to encourage young people to take up farming. For example, the Government of Quebec could extend access to the start-up subsidy, improve interest rate protection and raise eligibility limits, introduce a start-up subsidy for young people starting up in agriculture part time and gradually moving into full time, and create a single-window approach to match farms with no succession and young aspiring farmers without farms.

These were the ideas that came out of a tour by the Bloc Québécois concerning land use. My colleague for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, who is present, participated in this tour of Quebec. It is obvious that if we do not foster and support agricultural succession, farms in many regions will disappear. We have already provided some statistics. The member for Malpeque and I spoke about this. A number of farms cease operations every day in Quebec and Canada. We have to be proactive if we do not want farmers to disappear. These measures, which are loan guarantees, will be welcomed by some sectors.

Just last week we heard pork producers say that they are being affected by H1N1 even though we know very well that this flu is transmitted from human to human. They have not yet put their problems behind them and this type of program will not help.

This program also will not help potato farmers in Saint-Amable who are still fighting the golden nematode, which struck in 2006. They still do not have a long-term plan for alternative crops.

● (1315)

Therefore, there remains work to be done. I invite the government to reread what I just said about measures to help the next generation of farmers. It might really give a little bit of help to those who need it.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague and his party for supporting this bill, which is very important to our farmers. I can assure my colleague that our bill will benefit farmers.

Earlier, my colleague made some comments about the consultations. He mentioned that two organizations had not been involved. I would like to say here in this House that we conducted extensive

consultations across Canada. I have a five-page list of individuals, organizations, associations and agencies that took part in the consultations. There comes a time for action, and our government is taking action. It is not like it was with the Liberals. The Liberals held big meetings and endless consultations, but did not take action. As a government, we are taking action, and we are seeing the results this morning: a viable bill that will help our farmers.

I would like to ask my colleague a question. He knows two organizations that were not involved in the consultations. Has he gotten in touch with them to ask them to contact us about attending meetings? Has he gotten in touch with them by email or otherwise? Our doors are always open.

● (1320)

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture seems to think that I am going to do the government's work and start calling people to tell them that a consultation process is going on, and that they should take part in it. The government must do its homework and ensure that those who are directly affected by measures are indeed consulted. If these people could not go to Longueuil on that day, for whatever reason, surely it would have been possible for an Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada official to meet with them, or to telephone them if necessary. At the very least, someone from the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec should have been involved. As I said, I have the same five-page document to which the parliamentary secretary referred, and which mentions that a number of people were consulted. I never denied that; in fact I said it myself. However, among those who appeared in Longueuil were many bank people and Quebec government officials, but no one from the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec, the Coopérative fédérée, or the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec. These are all people who should have been consulted.

I want to tell the parliamentary secretary that, despite his claim to this effect, consulting is not his government's forte. Let us take the federal budget, for example. The Union des producteurs agricoles reacted by saying that this budget completely missed the mark, that it did not meet the needs of Quebec producers at all. This means that, if consultations did take place, then the government did not listen to people. Conversely, if there were no consultations, there should have been, so as to meet at least some of the agricultural producers' needs in that budget. Either way, there is something wrong.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the remarks by the member for Richmond—Arthabaska and how he spelled out some of the reality around this bill.

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In asking him a question, I want to take issue with the rewriting of history the parliamentary secretary tried to do by attacking the previous Liberal government. The fact of the matter is the previous Liberal government provided actual cash in the BSE crisis, some \$520 million. For the BSE recovery program, there was \$200 million. For the cull animal program, there was \$680 million. There was money for the transitional industry support program, the fed cattle set aside program, the feeder cattle set aside program and many more. My point is when there was a call for action, the previous government was there but all the Conservative government can do is provide loans.

In a statement on December 21, 2005, the Prime Minister promised that the new program would properly address “the cost of production, market revenue and inventory evaluation”. Has the Prime Minister come up with a cost of production program or was that just further information from the Conservative side and the Prime Minister?

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Malpeque for his question.

It has been proven that the election promises of the Conservatives were just that: election promises. In many areas, including agriculture, people were disappointed time and again. Earlier, we listed some of those disappointments. We did not mention them all, but we raised a number of issues. We realize that, ultimately, this government does a lot of window dressing and marketing. It is true that at the beginning of its first mandate, it was able to make people believe that, unlike others, it would make good on its promises.

However, as far as I am concerned, changing the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization program, or CAIS program, into the AgriRecovery, AgriStability, AgriInvest and some other programs was the same as getting four quarters for a dollar. I think that when the member for Malpeque was the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, he already agreed that the CAIS program needed to be changed. Even though it was a Liberal government that put this initiative in place, they knew that it was not working and that it was seriously flawed. Unfortunately, it is now very clear that the changes made have not helped the agricultural sector.

• (1325)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his speech. I agree that this bill is a step in the right direction, but I also share his concerns about whether the government will really follow through on its promises.

There are a lot of farms in my riding, and farmers are frustrated by the fact that the Conservative government is not paying attention to them, nor doing anything to help them. The previous government, the Liberal government, was just as bad. This government has to decide to help farmers by giving them access to credit and loans because it is refusing to use such tools to help our forestry industries survive. I would like to ask my colleague if he really believes that, once this bill passes, the government will advance funds without delay for a number of other measures to help farmers.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from the NDP for her question. Her comment is on target.

I was asked by *La Terre de Chez Nous*, a newspaper distributed in rural communities throughout Quebec, about precisely this measure. I said what the member has said. Can we believe, regardless of what this government announces and intends to do, that it will really deliver the goods?

As I said just now in answer to the question from the member from Malpeque, it is hard to feel any assurance that all of this is going to be put in place the right way and that producers will truly be able to benefit from it. We hope so. That is why I said there are good measures in this bill and we will support it being passed as quickly as possible. We will be very vigilant, however. I would ask all my colleagues in the House to do the same, as things move ahead, to make sure that we do not end up with measures like the ones announced by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food before the budget when he proposed the AgriFlex program.

We all expected that it would be what the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and other farmers across Quebec and Canada had asked for: flexible programs for the provinces. But when we were presented with the budget, we saw that this was not at all what was being asked for. There were no income security support measures, and so it in no way met the expectations of agricultural producers. That is why I always say the devil is in the details, and I also say the government should have held more consultations, even though it says it made every effort and consulted a lot of people. In fact a news release was put out by the president of the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec stating that he would have liked to be consulted.

How can it be that he was not consulted, given that many of these measures affect young farmers, the farmers of tomorrow? I have found one association in all of Canada that was consulted and that spoke for young farmers. I have a lot of questions about the government's effectiveness when it comes to holding a genuine consultation. It is all very well to consult the banks, because they are affected by measures like these, but it was really essential to invite people who speak for young farmers.

[English]

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this critical issue to farmers. It is also a critical issue to consumers of those farm products, because without farmers clearly we would be at a loss. There are not too many of us who can provide for ourselves when it comes to food substance.

As much as the bill looks at increasing debt and doubles the amount of available credit from \$250,000 to \$500,000 for individual farmers, as my hon. colleague from the Bloc has pointed out, at least in Quebec, they did not talk to young farmers' associations.

Government Orders

Across this country, the age of farmers is on the increase. Parents quite often give their children advice. Unfortunately in a lot of cases, the parents in farm families are advising their children against getting into the farm business, to not be as foolish as they were. They are not just working on the farm to try to make it viable, the subsidy that farmers give to their farm is the off-farm job they have to perform to keep their farm.

There are not too many of us who would have a second job just to keep the first job. Farmers who are passionate about being farmers are willing to subsidize their own farm by getting a second job. We hope this credit program will not drive them into getting a third job just to pay the debt.

As we look at debt loads for farmers, it is quite telling. Where were the debt loads 10, 20, 30 years ago? In 1972, the debt to income ratio was 2:1. It went to 23:1 between 2004 and 2005, which is significant. Within that timeframe were the 1980s, where we saw interest rates of 18% to 22%, for those who remember it. I certainly remember it all too well, as I had to remortgage the family home when interest rates were 18% to 22%. What that meant as far as paying down the principal of the mortgage was about a penny a week.

Farmers got caught in that trap. To them it was not about paying a penny a week against the principal on the family home and farm, there were farm foreclosures across this country. Farms were lost, and farmers were driven off the land. In some cases these were farms that had been in a family for generations.

The problem with debt is that it can be an asset to a business. We should make no mistake about it, farms are small and medium size businesses, and sometimes they are very large enterprises, depending on the size of the farm. Debt is an instrument to be used as part of working the farm in the sense of what needs to be done. Most farmers have debt, whether it is for buying seeds or buying equipment, doing that capitalization.

We see the increase in debt clearly continuing from the seventies all the way through to this century. If that continues, the farmer may be caught in a period of high interest rates. The interest rates do not have to be as high as they were when I was a young person, at 18% to 22%; they simply have to move away from where they are now. The margins are so razor thin for farmers, if the debt ratio were to increase slightly, or the interest rates were to bump up by 4%, 5% or 6%, farmers would be in one heck of a lot of trouble. We, as a society, would be in even more trouble.

The bill has assets that New Democrats are willing to support to get to committee so we can do an investigation and work on the legislation. However, it does not have all the assets we need to see as a comprehensive policy for farmers across this country.

As my colleague mentioned, the vast majority of us lined up to get into the Senate courtyard last week when the pork producers were here to show our solidarity with pork producers, to show Canadians that pork is safe to consume. In fact, Canadian pork is the best pork, not only in this country or on this continent but around the world.

The pork producers were saying that they do not want another loan. The president of the Ontario Pork Producers Association said to me quite clearly, and I had been at an engagement with him not

long ago, that he does not want another loan. He has had enough loans to keep him in business until the end of his days, plus some. He said that he needed some money, that he needed cash was how he put it. As a friend of mine used to tell me, cash is king. In this case, he needs cash and his producers and the producers across this country also need that cash. They do not need additional debt.

• (1330)

There is not a farmer across this country who does not have debt. If we ask young farmers to take on debt, we are just emulating what we have asked young people to do with their education, which is to take on debt. We have seen the success of that. We have young folks who are bankrupt before they get to their 30th birthday. I have never seen that before in my lifetime. When I was a young man, I never saw young people go into bankruptcy just because they went to university.

Heaven forbid that we should tell young farmers that this is a great career, they are anxious to get at it, then we put them into debt and bankrupt them in 10 years. That will not do anything for farmers, and it will not do anything for this country. We need to make sure when we actually provide programs to young farmers and to existing farmers who are on the farm today that indeed we are supportive of them.

The farmers are saying they already subsidize their farms. It is called off-job farming. It is amazing to me how they can still do that. But we have seen casualties. My hon. colleague from Malpeque has quoted statistics numerous times in committee and here in the House about the number of farms we see going out of business in this country. If they were other enterprises, we would call that a crisis, but because they are farms, it seems to get lost.

It seems that if it happens to the farm community, it is assumed that someone else will farm that land. I can tell the House that in my riding there is a lot of fallow land, and it is not because the farmer let it go to fallow this year; it is because there is no one there to produce the land anymore.

We have watched different places close, such as CanGro, which my hon. colleague from Malpeque mentioned. CanGro was a processing plant in St. David's, just outside of my riding on the Niagara Peninsula. It was the last canning factory east of the Rocky Mountains. It took in a great deal of the tender fruit, especially pears and peaches, from the Niagara region. With the closure of that plant just over a year ago, those farmers who were growing clingstone peaches no longer have a market.

However, there is a market for peaches in this country. Canned peaches now do not come from St. David's, Ontario; they come from China. For those who happen to be growing peaches in the Niagara Peninsula, it is pretty tough to pick those peaches, send them over to China and expect them to be canned and sent back. Those farmers are pulling their trees out.

Government Orders

What do they do next? They can get another loan, but they do not have a crop to pay the last loan, so they get another loan with no income. How do they encourage their young folks to take over the family farm when the young people look around and all they see is a field where those peaches once grew?

There are some folks who are trying to be creative in marketing some different things. In fact one farmer's spouse said she was going to get back in the canning business because she does not believe the majority of Ontarians know how to can products anymore. She is probably right. She is going to start up a small business, teaching folks like me and my kids how to can. So they are going to keep their peach farm.

That is an innovative idea. Only farmers could come up with those innovative ideas. They are truly the most innovative group of small business people across this land. They really want to work, and they want to work with us. We have to find a way to work with them, a way that is different from the programs we have been handing to them for the last 30 or 40 years, because clearly they have not all worked. There was some short-term relief in some of them and a bit longer-term relief in others, but we have never fixed the problem to make sure they are viable.

There are many, many reasons as to why that viability does not exist today. Some talk about international markets; some talk about the local markets. But clearly there is a disconnect between what the consumer pays at the grocery store and what the farmers receive at the end, which is basically a pittance compared to what has been taken through the system. We see too many of them going out of business because they do not make enough money at it anymore. Some are so beat up and so worn out that they get to a stage where they simply say that enough is enough.

Too often we hear people say, "Your equity is in your farm. Do not worry about it. You can sell it when you get older."

• (1335)

If farmers have a viable farm in the greenbelt in Ontario, they need to keep it that way because it is the only thing they can sell it as. The problem is if they do not have any young people who want to take up farming or someone who wants to amalgamate the farm into their farm, they are stuck with a farm that is useless because they cannot sell it. All they are doing is holding it. Who are they holding it for, if it is not for the next generation or for neighbours? They might not want to lose any more money because they have already lost money or take on more debt. Farmers have built up equity through 40 years of sweat and toil on the lands to help feed Canadians. Now there is no return for those farmers, and that is a shame.

We talk about how we could help farmers. We talk to them about buying local. A couple of things happen when we buy local. Quite often we do it at the farmers' market, but we do not see any support for the farmers' markets across the country. Even though the Canadian Federation of Agriculture has asked for that support, it has not seen it yet. This would be one way to ensure our local producers could get to the farmers' market so they could make some additional money and become, hopefully, viable from a financial perspective.

However, the other side of it is the national grocery chains. Quite often there is no place for local products. There is no placement on

the shelf, as they call it in the trade. Because of the numbers of outsourced products, the quantities they can bring in and the way they can control them, they get pride of place. Even though local producers have that ability to produce the quantities, we still do not get pride of place. Sometimes we do not get any place at all. It depends sometimes on the local market itself or whether the local supermarket wants to do it.

I know my hon. colleague from Malpeque knows this when it comes to potatoes. I listened to a potato producer in Ontario who said producers sold their potatoes locally only after they had travelled 300 kilometres away and 300 kilometres back. I do not quite understand that. Here is a potato producer, planting potatoes down the street from where he wants to sell them, harvesting them, bagging them, shipping them away, only to ship them back to the same place he is going to sell them. Tell me the rationale to that. Could the government explain why we need to do this? It does not make any sense. It is one thing for potatoes to come from P.E.I. to Ontario. That is a different thing. Those things do not make sense. We need to find a way to make sense for agriculture producers. They are asking for that. They are not asking for a great deal. They are simply saying they need to make things make sense for them as farmers and for us as consumers.

My colleagues have talked about how we know things are made in Canada. I know my colleague from St. Catharines has done this with his wine tasting, but I would like to survey the folks in here and ask them this. When it comes to the wines the Niagara Peninsula, do they know what "cellared" means? What does VQA mean? If we look at a cellared product, it says "cellared in Canada". Does that mean it is a Canadian product? Are those grapes harvested, picked, pressed and put into a bottle here in Canada? The answer is no.

The grape that goes into that bottle of wine called "cellared in Canada" primarily comes from about three different places: Chile, Australia and sometimes South Africa. They are not coming from the Niagara Peninsula, or the Okanagan, or down by Pelee Island in southern Ontario. If we truly want to buy a Canadian bottle of wine from the Niagara Peninsula, with grapes grown in the Niagara Peninsula, to support those producers, those owners of those vineyards, then we need to buy VQA, Vintners Quality Alliance, which means 100% of that grape in that bottle is from Canada, not from somewhere else.

We need to ensure those things change. Canadian consumers want to find a way to protect the producer, to buy from the producer. They just do not have the ability sometimes because they do not have the knowledge. We cloud over labelling so consumers think they may have bought a bottle of wine that has been produced in Ontario, by a vineyard that they can see as they go through the Niagara Peninsula. When we tell them it is not Canadian, they are indignant. They do not believe it has come from somewhere else. They drove to that winery in the Niagara Peninsula and bought the wine directly from it. That might be so, but the juice came from somewhere else.

Government Orders

● (1340)

I talked to the president of the Ontario Grape Growers Marketing Board, Debbie Zimmerman. She brought out a bottle of cellared wine, put it on the desk and then asked me a question about it. Fortunately, I knew the difference between the two. I have a few friends who work in the industry.

The label on the one bottle had the 2010 Olympics on it. We have a cellared bottle of wine with the Canadian Olympic logo on it. That suggests to everybody that not only is it a Canadian wine, but it is also in support of the Canadian Olympics. However, it turns out, it was not.

That is a sad epitaph to what really is happening to farms across this nation. We have to find ways to support them, which we are not doing.

We talk about the credit programs, and there have been many of them over the years. My colleagues on the other side, who have been here longer than I and who have worked on the agriculture committee, have seen them come and go. In fact, some from the other side used to complain about it. Some who are now on this side used to come out with those programs and say that they were not any good. Now we have vice versa. It is funny how shoes change feet sometimes.

Ultimately it is about all of us wanting to help the farm community and those farmers. I do not think any members in the House would say that they do not want to help farmers. In fact, I do not think people on the street would say that they did not want to help farmers. The difficulty is, how do we do it?

Without a comprehensive policy, we will simply come out with band-aids. This becomes one of them. Band-aids can be good, as they help stem the flow of blood for the moment. However, ultimately they get saturated and they start to seep again, and we see other problems.

We need a comprehensive agricultural policy that addresses the needs of farmers in the broader sense, not just in the one-off sense of getting them some additional available credit, albeit needed. We need to ensure farms are not only viable right from the time they are taken over, but attractive to young people who go into farming as well.

Unfortunately, I think the average age of farmers is somewhere in the mid-50s. That is not really where we want to see farmers. We want to see that age decline by 10, 15, 20 years, so young folks coming out of agricultural colleges will get into the farm business. Ultimately we are looking to see that happen.

We are pleased the government has brought this forward. It is an enhancement of a previous program, but it needs work. The New Democrats on the agriculture committee are willing to help make that work. We are willing to ensure that our farmers will get the support they need.

Make no mistake, we are also looking at a comprehensive policy that deals with the needs of farmers, not just the immediate but the long-term needs as well. It is in our interest to ensure that happens. Ultimately, if we do not, I will end up trying to find that old rusty

hoe I have somewhere in the garage and will have to start digging and competing with the rabbits to try to grow carrots.

If that does not work, I will be looking for somebody else to do it for me. In that case, I will be working for that person on a farm field somewhere. Ultimately, without farmers doing the things they do, we are in real peril. If we allow ourselves to be hostage to those who import the food to us or those exporting nations, if we rely on staple products because we are no longer doing it, then we are going to be in trouble. We do trade. We do not necessarily grow oranges here, so we import them.

At some point in time someone is going to tell us that there is not enough for us. We have seen that already. Some exporting nations have said that they have had a drought or a bad crop year so they have had to keep their products internally.

If we do not grow our own because we have not supported our farmers and have allowed them to disappear, shame on us. It is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that we protect farmers, that we listen to them and bring forward programs that look at farming in a comprehensive way. We need to ensure that agriculture is sustainable throughout the country. We need to ensure that farmers can sustain themselves into the next century.

● (1345)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the remarks by the member for Welland. He started off by mentioning the fact that the president of Ontario Pork Producers' Marketing Board said that he had enough debt. Given the figures that the Library of Parliament provided to me this weekend, in 2006-07 the average debt of hog farms in Canada increased by 22%. That is the advance payment program loans the government provided, which has really put them in a further hole. The debt went up nearly as bad in 2007-08.

I take it from the member's remarks that he is zeroing in on the fact that the government is failing to develop a comprehensive policy for farmers in total, and I agree. Earlier I asked the parliamentary secretary this question. While providing availability of credit to farmers, is the real purpose of the bill to guarantee a return to the banks? The loans are guaranteed at 95%.

Does the member for Welland agree with my premise that this is really a bill that provides guarantees to the banks, establishes further the record of the Government of Canada as increasing debt and ignores sustaining farm incomes?

Does he agree with that and what is his position relative to guaranteeing the banks' security while leaving the farmers out in pure thing air?

● (1350)

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, the last thing the New Democrats want is for the banks to become more profitable at the expense of farmers.

The New Democrats are on the side of farmers and always have been. In fact, we have a history of being on the side of farmers. It goes back quite a number of years to the CCF. I will not recant the history because I am sure most members of the House know it. We are indeed a party of the prairies and we are indeed a party for farmers, and we are very proud of that.

Government Orders

An hon. member: Do you have any members on the prairies?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Yes, we do as a matter of fact.

In any case, let me turn to the issue of debt and quote statistics from the United States, which show that debt to income ratios in the United States was 2.9:1 between 2004 and 2005 versus the statistic that I gave earlier for Canada, which was 23:1. We should think about that in terms of what type of income one has left over when one's debt ratio is that low.

What have we been doing that is so significantly different than our counterparts in the United States when it comes to our farm programs, where their debt to income ratio is so significantly lower than ours? It is clear that the higher the debt one has, the more it consumes one's income.

That means farmers cannot invest in R and D, innovation and equipment or buy additional agricultural land when the need arises and when it is there for them to do. They perhaps cannot put more food on their own tables. Perhaps they cannot even send their kids to university. They do not have enough money because they are paying the debt. That is a crime against our farmers.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech. He is newly elected to Parliament and therefore a new member of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. I want to say that his contributions there have been very helpful. He has really good ideas and I am happy to sit on this committee with him.

He had some really good things to say as well in his speech, especially when he said that measures like the loan guarantees in the program that Bill C-29 would provide are little more than a band-aid solution when what we need is a real agricultural policy. People are entitled to that, not necessarily in this bill, but in general. How is it possible that since this government came to power in 2006, there has been a total absence of any agricultural vision or policy to help farmers?

My colleague knows, of course, that Ontario and Quebec grain producers have joined forces to promote a program designed by and for them and implemented by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. This is the AgriFlex program I mentioned earlier.

Can my colleague explain why the government did not simply look at what is in this kind of program, advocated by the grain producers of Ontario and Quebec, instead of trying to complicate things, because the government always says why make things easy when they could be made hard? The producers have their own income support program, but they would like the federal funding for agriculture to go directly to the provinces, which can then adapt the federal programs to their own needs and the needs of their producers.

Why did the Conservatives promise this in the election campaign? Why did they promise it just before the budget and then table a document that made a total hash of what the farmers had presented?

Can my colleague explain what the government was doing here?

● (1355)

[English]

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I said earlier that we need a comprehensive policy. My colleague from British Columbia Southern Interior has been on a food for thought tour for about eight months which will be completed when he finally reaches the east coast some time later in the summer.

We will actually look at having a comprehensive policy for agriculture and food for the first time across this country. We have never had one. All we have had are stop-gap measures. Our response to a crisis is to put a band-aid on it, and when there is another crisis, we get another band-aid out, and on it goes. It is similar to the old story of the boy using his finger to plug a hole in a dike. After using all of one's fingers and thumbs, if there is still a leak and one is a nimble person, one could use one's toes, but ultimately, if the dike is not fixed, it will forever spring a leak.

That is what we see in agriculture. Farmers are telling us there is a problem with the system. It is not about individual producers. It is not about sectors, whether it be red meat, oil seeds or horticulture. Farmers are saying there is a problem with the entire system and there needs to be a policy. We need to talk about how to fix it. Ultimately, we need to fix it so we can go forward. We cannot go forward with a haphazard policy that fixes one thing today and ignores another thing tomorrow until there is another crisis.

It is in all of our interests for all of us to come together and finally establish an agriculture policy for the entire country. It would be the best thing for Canadians and consumers, but more important, it would be the best thing for our farmers now and in the future.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I particularly appreciated the attention my hon. colleague paid to what young farmers are dealing with. I took note of his reference in terms of the increased debt that young people in Canada face today.

Only this morning I had a chance to meet with student leaders from McGill University who spoke very clearly about the pressures student debt puts on them today. It is very much the same story with young farmers, many of whom have decided to follow other paths because they can no longer make ends meet. This is extremely problematic for an industry that is very much at the core of who we are as Canadians.

I would like to ask my fellow colleague what his thoughts are about the supports that are needed in this industry in order to support young farmers, people who have spent their lives making this industry a reality and, as a result, benefits that could be provided to this industry that would be to the advantage of all Canadians.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of being in the Simcoe and Delhi area not long ago. Although it was a pleasure to be there, it was an unfortunate situation because of the buyout program for the tobacco farmers in that area.

Statements by Members

One can debate the merits of whether we should grow tobacco or not, but for those farmers it was clearly the end of an era. When I talked to some of the farmers, especially those who were a little bit older and had been in the business for a long time, they were not talking about themselves exiting that industry. They were talking about young farmers who were going to be exiting at a point in their lives when they had taken on the maximum debt load and were now seeing no income whatsoever. All they had basically was \$1.05 a pound to buy back the program. They were wondering what to do next.

In fact, a few of those young farmers asked me what I thought they should farm next. I live in the country, but as I have told many friends, I just grow big trees. They grow all by themselves. I have a managed wood lot, so the trees just grow. I do not know how they grow. They just grow. The farmers were asking me what to do next. I had no idea what product a young farmer should get into farming next. They were at a point in their lives when they truly did not know.

We need a comprehensive policy that talks about agriculture and does not force young folks on the farm to start out so far in debt that they are going to be bankrupt by the time they are 35. That would be unconscionable.

• (1400)

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

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

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

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

NATIONAL POLICE WEEK

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House during National Police Week to pay tribute to the brave men and women who selflessly protect our families and our communities each and every day.

Our government prides itself on the support it continues to provide to the police community. We are firmly committed to ensuring that police have the legislative backing needed to tackle crime.

We have passed laws providing for mandatory prison sentences, made it tougher for offenders to get out of prison, and eliminated house arrest for serious crime.

This government has introduced legislation to tackle auto theft, property crime and identity theft, and to increase penalties for gang and organized crime related violence and drug trafficking.

This government has also provided funding to hire more police officers for the provinces and municipalities. We now have 1,500 new RCMP officers in place.

I and other members of our party have worn the uniform, be it municipal, provincial or RCMP, and we can all attest to the commitment and dedication police officers bring to their jobs every day.

National Police Week is a chance for all of us to show our appreciation for these outstanding men and women, who, as we are reminded today, place their lives on the line every day.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMENDATION

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Mr. Jan Van Der Rassel, a Korean war veteran and Canadian Forces veteran from my riding.

Earlier today Mr. Van Der Rassel was presented with a Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation for the remarkable work he does to assist veterans and their dependents.

Mr. Van Der Rassel has been an active member of the Korea Veterans Association of Canada, KVA, for more than 30 years. In fact, he was instrumental in organizing the charter for KVA Unit No. 58 in North Bay.

Mr. Van Der Rassel is also a member of the Memory project and is heavily involved in community fundraising.

I have had the great pleasure of working with Van over the past several years, and I have always been extremely impressed by his commitment to his community and his fellow veterans, whether it is visiting them to bring up their spirits or helping them obtain the benefits they so deserve.

On behalf of all hon. members, I wish to congratulate Jan Van Der Rassel on receiving a Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation, and express my sincere gratitude for his tremendous commitment to veterans and their dependents.

* * *

[Translation]

MUNICIPALITY OF SAINT-ESPRIT

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the fabulous work done by the committee and the people involved in organizing the municipality of Saint-Esprit's participation in the program *La petite séduction* as part of the festivities to mark the village's 200th anniversary. On April 22, 2009, Quebec television viewers had the opportunity to see Véronique Cloutier warmly welcomed to the village of Saint-Esprit. The people of Saint-Esprit should be delighted by their success. Their guest was captivated by their unique character.

Statements by Members

That event was part of the enormous success of Saint-Esprit's bicentennial and reflected the residents' pride in their municipality. As the member of Parliament for Montcalm, I would like to congratulate them on their efforts to introduce ourselves to the rest of Quebec.

I would like to thank Danielle Allard, mayor of Saint-Esprit, Jean Latendresse, chair of the 200th anniversary celebrations, and all the volunteers and members of the organizing committee for this marvellous initiative.

* * *

[English]

WINDSOR SPITFIRES

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Friday night the Windsor Spitfires capped off an incredible playoff run with a 2-1 overtime win over the Brampton Battalion to win the Spitfires' first OHL championship in 21 years.

Only one season removed from the tragic loss of the team's tremendous captain, Mickey Renaud, the Spits, under the skilled leadership of a remarkable ownership group and the unwavering support of the community, have christened the Windsor Family Credit Union Centre, in the centre's first season, the home of the Windsor Spitfires with the J. Ross Robertson Cup.

I would like to congratulate owners Peter Dobrich, Warren Rychel and Bob Boughner, who have led this proud franchise back to prominence. The member for Windsor—Tecumseh and I wish them and the entire organization the best of luck in the Memorial Cup.

The Spitfires have the support of the community behind them. Go Spits go.

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• (1405)

ALBERTA FILM AND TELEVISION AWARDS

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 2 I attended the 2009 Rosies, the Alberta Film and Television Awards, where two constituents won two prestigious awards.

MacKenzie Porter won the Best Actress award for her outstanding work in the Nomadic Pictures production, *The Other Woman*. Landon Liboiron was awarded Best Actor for his exemplary performance in the Seven24 Films production, *Wild Roses*.

MacKenzie hails from Medicine Hat and comes from a talented family. Kalan Porter, *Canadian Idol* 2004 winner, is MacKenzie's older brother. MacKenzie is 19 years old and has already performed in several cinema and TV productions and undoubtedly has a tremendous career ahead of her.

Landon, from Jenner, Alberta, is a grade 12 student at St. Joseph's Collegiate in Brooks. Remarkably, this is 18-year-old Landon's second Rosie. We will soon see this wonderfully talented and accomplished young man on CTV's *Degrassi: The Next Generation*.

On behalf of my constituents, I want to extend our congratulations to MacKenzie and Landon. They are an inspiration and we are all tremendously proud.

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMENDATION

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Garnett Turner of Kensington, P.E.I., for receiving a Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation. The award recognizes those who have made a substantial contribution to the care and well-being of veterans.

Mr. Turner's service to the Canadian war effort during the second world war is exemplary and includes time in the Canadian army as well as the Merchant Navy. Since the war, Mr. Turner has played an active role in the Royal Canadian Legion and has been a member of Legion Branch No. 9 in Kensington for 55 years.

Through a project called Passing the Torch, Mr. Turner has taken photos of cenotaphs and war memorials in an effort to compile a more extensive list of those who have served and to perpetuate their names in recognition of their service. It is a superb piece of work.

On behalf of this House, I congratulate his exceptional contribution to our community and to the legacy of Canadian heroes.

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LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals, hot off their do-nothing convention, have a new slogan: "We can" That is really original. I wonder where they came up with that.

Here is what we know so far about what Liberals mean when they say, "We can".

"We can" means they can raise taxes on the backsides of Canadian families.

"We can" means they can abandon a majority of Canadians, including first nations, who support scrapping the long-gun registry.

"We can" means they can all sign onto a coalition government that they now say would have deeply and enduringly divided Canadians.

Conservatives have a saying too: "We are".

We are keeping taxes low for Canadians during these economic times.

We are providing stimulus for industries to emerge stronger and greener than ever, and we are moving forward on our promise to dismantle the long-gun registry.

What is the irony of all of this? In the last election, we asked Canadians for permission to rebuild and modernize Canada's infrastructure and lead them through this global recession, and their answer was, "Yes, we can".

Statements by Members

[Translation]

MICHÈLE ROULEAU

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I wish to congratulate a great lady from my riding, Ms. Michèle Rouleau, who was just awarded an honorary doctorate by the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT).

Originally from Senneterre in Abitibi, Ms. Rouleau has been an advocate for the rights of native women. She has served as the director of the Senneterre native friendship centre, president of Quebec Native Women and a commissioner on the AFN Renewal Commission. She has always been actively involved in her community and today is a consultant in aboriginal affairs and a facilitator.

Michèle Rouleau was awarded Quebec's Prix de la Justice award and the Droits et libertés award by Quebec's Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse. She is also a Chevalier de l'Ordre national du Québec.

By awarding this honorary doctorate, UQAT is underscoring the exceptional commitment made by this remarkable humanitarian. We are very proud of this honour, which reflects on the entire community and riding.

Congratulations, Michèle.

* * *

[English]

AGRICULTURAL LOANS

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of new farmers and young farmers in my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex to commend my colleague, the Minister of Agriculture, for introducing the Canadian agricultural loans bill.

Since being elected, I have been privileged to conduct a number of round table meetings with all sectors of agriculture that have provided me with important input on issues. I have heard consistently from young farmers about the challenges they face in trying to carry on the family farm.

The Canadian agricultural loans bill would allow young farmers entering the farming business and intergenerational farmers hoping to take over the family farm the opportunity to access loans of up to \$500,000. These significant changes were not available under the previous program.

This is yet another example of our government's commitment to the agriculture industry and to new farmers, and our recognition of its importance to Canada.

* * *

● (1410)

SPEECH AND HEARING AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Isabelle Allain, from my riding of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, who has been awarded the

prestigious student excellence award by the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists.

Isabelle, who is currently completing her master's in speech pathology at McGill, is a former New Brunswick ambassador to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights.

[Translation]

Isabelle also earned an honours B.A. in international development and Spanish at Dalhousie University.

[English]

This award is timely, as May is Speech and Hearing Awareness Month in Canada.

Speech pathologists like Isabelle work with children, adults and seniors, and their families, helping to deal with different communication disorders, and improving the lives of everyone who may have to deal with hearing or speech issues.

I ask this House to join me in congratulating Isabelle Allain and the difference she is making.

* * *

SECURITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, hate crimes undermine the security of our neighbourhoods. The communities at risk security infrastructure program is a \$3 million initiative that allows targeted communities to apply for funding to improve security and enhance their safety.

Canada is not immune to violent acts that target individuals based on their race, culture or identity. Crimes that target community or religious institutions are sometimes considered to be victimless crimes, but this is not the case. Hate-motivated crime leaves more than just physical harm because it targets an entire community.

That is why our government has acted to extend this important program, allowing community organizations to apply for federal funding to assist with upgrades to security infrastructure. This program continues our government's efforts to not only punish crimes but also to prevent them whenever possible.

Now is the time for community organizations to apply for this funding. Whether it is for a synagogue, a mosque or a community centre, all Canadians deserve the right to feel safe in their community, and our Conservative government is taking action to enhance both safety and security.

* * *

[Translation]

ÉDITH BUTLER

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Acadian Édith Butler was awarded the highest distinction granted a performing artist in Canada. She received a Governor General's Performing Arts Award.

Statements by Members

On behalf of the people of her home riding, Acadie—Bathurst, I would like to convey our gratitude, admiration and pride.

Through song and story, Édith brought Acadia to the world, and taught so many about the place we call home. Most importantly, she brought it to life just as she brought us many a happy moment singing “Paquetville, Paquetville”.

Her heritage and the joy it brings are part of our collective psyche. I would like to pay tribute to this extraordinary artist's 40-year career, to her exceptional contribution to our cultural life, and to her generosity, both on stage and off.

We thank Édith. Congratulations, and best wishes in her future endeavours.

* * *

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberal ideology at its worst has returned on the other side of the House. The Liberal leader wants to raise taxes. Raise taxes for the good of the nation, he said.

This weekend, the Liberal leader also denied his party's recent history. After—like all his colleagues—signing a letter to the Governor General begging her to allow the opposition to lead the country with an unelected coalition, today he is dissociating himself from that.

For this man, Quebec is a little like Minnesota or Vermont. He recognizes Quebec's distinctness only by highway signs written in French. I have no congratulations for him.

For the Liberal leader, there is nothing like a healthy tax increase, a latent insult to Quebecers and a firm denial of history. We expected nothing less from a Liberal leader who is gradually falling into line with the shortsighted ideology of his party and that of Trudeau.

* * *

• (1415)

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today in Montreal, various organizations got together to call on the government to shoulder its responsibilities with regard to Canadian mining companies abroad.

The Canadian government's response to the National Roundtables on Corporate Social Responsibility and the Canadian Extractive Industry in Developing Countries report shows that it fails to understand the issues involved. It has ignored the many recommendations made by the industry and civil society on how to ensure that foreign activities by Canadian extractive companies comply with international environmental and human rights standards.

The Bloc Québécois supports this report, which recommends developing a code of practice for extractive companies, introducing independent oversight and accounting mechanisms and implementing punitive measures for companies that violate the code of conduct.

It is deplorable that the Canadian government lacks vision and prefers to rely on companies to take voluntary action.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL NURSING WEEK

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, throughout this week, I encourage my colleagues to have a special thought about some of the hardest-working Canadians: our nurses. Let us all honour those who care for us in our time of greatest need during National Nursing Week because. The slogan for this year's nursing week is, “Nursing: You can't live without it!”

[Translation]

National Nursing Week is our opportunity to extend special thanks to all those who care for us and our loved ones through the trials of illness “with heart and skill”, as this year's slogan says.

[English]

National Nursing Week is timed to coincide with the birthday of Florence Nightingale, who defined the modern role our nurses play.

[Translation]

Even though nursing has changed a great deal since the Crimean War, when Florence Nightingale redefined the nurse's role, it is still a huge and difficult job. That is why, on behalf of all the members of this House, I want to say thank you to all these dedicated people.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the annual policy convention, the Liberal Party passed a motion reaffirming its support for a job-killing carbon tax.

Even during these times of economic uncertainty, we should not be too surprised to see the carbon tax back on the front page of the Liberal platform, considering that overtaxing Canadians regardless of the economic situation is encoded in the Liberal DNA.

There is more. Not only is a job-killing carbon tax in the works but the Liberal leader also committed his party to raising even more taxes when he said, “We will have to raise taxes”.

What taxes does he want to raise, a new tax on Canadian families, a crushing tax on businesses? We have no details on this new Liberal tax scheme. What taxes do the Liberals want to raise? Who would be affected? How would the Liberals go about raising these taxes? Why do they refuse to tell Canadians?

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the unemployment rate is the highest it has been in eight years. Over 300,000 Canadians have lost their jobs since the fall. These Canadian families are the ones bearing the brunt of the Conservative recession, but the government has done nothing to address regional inequalities in the employment insurance system.

When will the government establish a national eligibility threshold that is fair to all Canadians, at 360 hours?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are concerned about people who have been unlucky and lost their jobs through no fault of their own. That is why we extended benefits. It is now easier for people to collect benefits, and they can collect them for a longer period of time. For example, people in Kitchener can collect employment insurance five weeks earlier than last year. They can collect benefits for 14 weeks.

They are all about rhetoric and raising taxes; we are about increasing benefits.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we already know that the Conservative government has a frustrating tendency to break its promises: income trusts, income tax. Last fall, the Conservatives promised to make employment insurance available to self-employed Canadians. They have not done so.

The government seems to be counting on Canadians to create their own jobs, so when will it keep its promise and give them access to employment insurance?

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are looking at alternatives. Of course we are. One of the things that we committed to Canadians we would evaluate are what options exist for people claiming maternity benefits or parental benefits when they are self-employed. We committed to establishing an expert panel to study that and we look forward to doing that.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if excuses were gold, the Conservative government could pay off its humongous deficit in a matter of a couple of weeks. Unfortunately, excuses do not count for much when the power is shut off at home because one's EI cheque has not been delivered. Excuses do not put food on the table and they do not pay for children's clothes.

Why has the government sat on its hands while hundreds of thousands of Canadians face financial ruin? Why?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the Liberals are so dissatisfied with the EI system, why did they wait 13 years while they were in power and do nothing about it?

Oral Questions

Canadians deserve to get the benefits for which they have paid. That is why we brought on another 900 people, to make sure that they get those benefits quickly. We are hiring 400 more to make sure that those who are unfortunate enough to become unemployed through no fault of their own are getting the benefits. We have expanded those benefits.

Meanwhile, the Liberals are only expanding their rhetoric and they want to increase taxes to go with it.

* * *

SRI LANKA

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, violence continues in Sri Lanka today while Tamil Canadians mourn death after death. Civilians are being massacred and Canada has failed to step up to the international plate. Yesterday the UN called this conflict a "bloodbath", but the UN is still not allowed a role in securing safety for civilians.

Specifically, what instructions has the government given to our UN ambassador and our high commissioner to aggressively pursue a ceasefire and to ensure an international humanitarian presence?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has taken significant steps. We have continually asked for a ceasefire and unhindered access for humanitarian aid. We have increased our humanitarian aid support.

I was in Sri Lanka last week. I gave instructions to our high commissioner there to diligently pursue the call for a ceasefire. We have engaged with the humanitarian organizations that are working there. We will continue to support the innocent civilian victims.

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, volunteers are today digging mass graves for Tamil women and children killed by Sri Lankan army shelling. Tens of thousands more have been herded into government detention camps where British television exposed horrific living conditions, murders, disappearances and rampant sexual abuse of women.

I ask the government why it has been so late and so lame in the defence of women and children against this brutality.

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is very aware of the impact this is having on innocent women and children. That is why we have called for unhindered free access for humanitarian organizations, who are being kept out of the no-fire zone, who are being kept out of the refugee camps.

We are taking significant steps and we are joining other concerned countries in the pressure we are applying for a ceasefire and help for the innocent victims.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, just as we are learning that Canada could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2020, the government appoints an individual who has denied the existence of climate change to the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council. This same government has called climate change a socialist plot. I would like to remind members that the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council provides funding to scientists who study climate change.

By appointing a person who does not believe in climate change to a scientific research council, is the Prime Minister plotting with the oil companies this time?

• (1425)

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are making progress on greenhouse gases.

I would like to inform the House today of a disconcerting fact. The Bloc environment critic has spent his political career criticizing the oil sands and considering himself an expert in environmental issues. However, when given the opportunity to travel to Alberta with the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development and to form his own ideas about the oil sands operations, he refused the invitation and remained in Ottawa. Why?

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am having some difficulty understanding this answer.

I would like to come back to the fact that this appointment is absurd. It is like appointing someone who does not believe in the existence of cancer to a medical research council.

Will the Prime Minister admit that by appointing people who dispute a scientific reality, in this case climate change, he is once again taking an ideological approach?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. Our government is currently working with the Obama administration on a plan with the same underlying principles as those of the United States. We share the same economic and environmental space as the United States and we will continue to work with them.

The Bloc should abandon its partisanship and work with the government.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a new study reveals that Canada could reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2020, if only there were a will to do so. The situation is especially interesting since it could be achieved through proven techniques without having to resort to carbon capture and sequestration, a technology that has yet to prove itself.

Does the Minister of the Environment plan to use that report as an opportunity to finally announce a real shift in the fight against climate change?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is a real shift. The Bloc member no longer has the necessary credibility to talk about technologies and the oil sands,

since he was given the opportunity to see the oil sands development project in Alberta for himself but refuses to go.

I do not think Quebeckers want to have a representative who forms his opinions in his living room.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will stay in this House this week because I want to be here for the unveiling of the environment commissioner's report tomorrow, which will form a judgment on this government's attitude towards the Kyoto protocol. That is why we are staying here.

If the government wants to be taken seriously about the fight against climate change, why does it refuse to follow the Bloc's proposal and implement dynamic measures to develop biofuels like cellulosic ethanol? This would be beneficial not only for the forestry regions, but also for the fight against climate change. That is the reality.

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. The Bloc Québécois must do its homework. We have a strategy to reduce greenhouse gases. We have a strategy for this issue. For instance, we have adopted stricter targets, like the Americans. That is why we have established a mechanism for dialogue with the U.S. on clean energy, green energy, hydro and other issues.

* * *

[English]

SRI LANKA

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Sri Lankan civil war is rapidly becoming a bloodbath. This weekend, indiscriminate bombing has killed hundreds, perhaps even thousands of civilians, a hundred of them children, by reports we are hearing.

Canada's 300,000 Tamils are calling, writing, appealing and are in the streets asking for our government to help.

We simply cannot stand by and watch this slaughter continue. Will the Prime Minister or his senior government officials agree to meet with respected leaders of the Tamil community to discuss the crisis, and will he be in touch with the President of Sri Lanka to call a halt to the bloodbath?

• (1430)

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first let me commend the leader of the NDP for the help he gave in defusing the situation in the demonstrations yesterday in Toronto.

We will continue to have discussions. Many of the government members have met with the Tamil community. We share their concerns. We will continue to dialogue with them. We will have meetings with any Tamil community representative who is not part of a terrorist organization.

We are working to enhance the ability for members of the government at a senior level to meet with this community.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for that response.

On another topic, in January the government promised to invest \$4 billion in infrastructure, but all it did was announce old projects from the 2006 budget. The cities and provinces are ready to get going on new projects, but they are still waiting for the money. However, unemployed workers and their families are especially in need of help at this critical time.

Will the Prime Minister and his government promise to take money from their coffers now, by means of a gas tax transfer, to create jobs this summer?

[English]

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are working very closely with our provincial counterparts and municipalities right across this country to make sure that we get the dollars out the door. We want to make sure that we employ people, not like the Liberals who will raise taxes and destroy that opportunity.

We are working very closely with them to make sure that we get the money out the door. That is actually what we will do.

We have a significant amount started. A number of projects right across this country have actually been announced, but more than that, we are just revving up the engine. Stay tuned. We are about to roll it out very fast.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with responses like that, it is no surprise, then, that the OECD has named Canada as one of the countries that is not getting out of the recession, while others are turning a corner.

The government has missed the boat on the creation of employment through a stimulus program this summer. It has missed the summer construction season.

Will the Conservatives at least do something to save the fall construction season by transferring the rest of the funds directly to the municipalities, using the gas tax formula that is there, and put people back to work?

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. We are actually getting projects out the door right now. In fact, I can tell the House that in Edmonton, just a very short time ago, we announced a \$100 million project. Shovels were in the ground within two weeks. That is what is happening right now. We are employing people. That is just one example of many right across this country and it is actually happening.

We will not miss this construction season. We will get the shovels in the ground and Canadians working and meet the challenges of today.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development must be lost somewhere in the twilight zone.

When asked to improve access to EI benefits in regions like B.C. where access requirements are among the toughest, she continues to mislead by referring to the added five weeks of benefits, which might as well be 500 weeks to those who cannot get access.

Does the minister not understand that, in a recession, her rigid qualification rules just do not work?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. The facts are that accessibility and benefits have gone up in EI in every region in British Columbia in the last few months.

Wherever people are in B.C., it is easier to access EI and they can get it for a longer period. Yes, we added five weeks of additional regular benefits because that is what Canadians asked for. The increase in benefits in some places is as much as 11 weeks. Eleven minus five is six. That is still an increase apart from the extra five weeks we introduced. We are delivering for those who need our help.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is just not acceptable. My province is hemorrhaging jobs, with 25,000 lost in the forestry sector alone. In my province, a gentleman from Campbell River, who lost his job two weeks before the new standards came in, cannot get EI.

Would the minister finally do the right thing and enact the single standard we are asking for, which is a 360 hour EI eligibility? Will she do the right thing and do this for our workers who have lost their jobs in B.C. and across Canada?

• (1435)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are making every effort to help those who have been unfortunate enough to lose their jobs, which is why people in Vancouver can get seven weeks of benefits more than they could a year ago. They can get those weeks easier as well.

We are also going beyond that. We are expanding training opportunities for all who are unfortunate enough to lose their jobs, not just those who are on EI but those who have been out of the workplace for a long time. We want to help them get the skills they need for the jobs of the future so they can continue to look after their families over the long term.

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AIR INDIA

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, government documents of 24 years ago related to the Air India tragedy were recently provided to the Major inquiry while the public hearing phase of the Major inquiry wrapped up over a year ago. The government of the day did not provide all of the available evidence to the Kirpal Commission of India because of the potential for national embarrassment.

Oral Questions

Why were these documents not provided to the Major inquiry during the public hearings so that Canadians could see how the government failed Canadians, the Canadian families and the victims?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is an ongoing inquiry into the Air India disaster and it would be appropriate, before we get any gratuitous comments on this matter, that we let that commission do its work and wait for its report.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is gratuitous is that nonsensical answer that just came from the minister.

The Conservative government ought to have known what it had. It was withholding information about the single biggest act of terrorism in Canadian history. Instead, it covered up the cover-up.

The government has now provided this information to the Major inquiry behind closed doors. Why did the Conservatives hide this information from Canadians until after the public hearing phase of the inquiry was over?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know for sure that we went for 13 years without having an inquiry under the Liberals. Why does he not answer the question? Why did they not do something about it when they had the opportunity?

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[Translation]

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government's ideological stubbornness about scientific research is threatening a sector that is crucial to this society's development and could cause a brain drain to other countries. Investing in concrete is not everything.

Does the minister realize that the government's new science priorities are having a disastrous impact, that a number of research projects will have to be abandoned, including the projects at the Université du Québec à Rimouski and the Université du Québec en Abitibi—Témiscamingue, and that scientific treasures such as Coriolis II and the Mont-Mégantic observatory are being threatened?

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC): Mr. Speaker, these decisions are made by an independent panel. I am pleased to announce that that same independent panel announced six new research projects at the University of Quebec in Rimouski. They include research into marine life and the effects of climate change. Is that not interesting?

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the decision by Canada Economic Development to support the Mont-Mégantic observatory for just two years will in no way guarantee its survival, its funding or its expansion, according to its executive director, Robert Lamontagne.

Can the minister tell us now what he plans to do to help the observatory survive?

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me repeat that this government respects the decisions of an independent panel. What the government does is makes a decision to put \$5.1 billion into our science and technology sector and then an independent panel decides which projects receives that.

I am very excited to say that a lot of the research that has been decided upon is based in marine biology, oceans, the effects of climate change on oceans and so on. That member over there voted against that kind of funding.

* * *

[Translation]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after Robert Lepage and Stanley Péan, it is Clémence DesRochers's turn to speak out against the lack of consideration this government shows for artists. This government is so disconnected from reality that it has come to regard it as virtually the norm for recipients to criticize it when they accept their prizes.

Does the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages realize that his policies are not helping artists, and in fact are hurting them?

• (1440)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Saturday evening was a wonderful event for Canadian artists, and my colleague was not even there. It was a tremendous celebration for Canadian artists.

I would like to thank my colleague for giving me an opportunity to point out that it is our Conservative government that increased investment in arts and culture by 8% during its first term. In addition, in our 2009-10 anti-crisis budget, we have again increased spending for artists, the arts and culture by \$276 million.

We keep our promises.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister says one thing but does the opposite.

The little regard the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages has for culture can also be seen in his attitude toward the CBC. On the one hand, he assures the committee there will be no cuts to the television budget, and on the other, the president of the CBC, Hubert Lacroix, announces in a memo to his employees that he is expecting another \$56 million in cuts.

If the Minister told the truth in committee, how can he explain the memo from the president of the CBC to his employees?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague should read Mr. Lacroix's memo again. The purpose of the strategic review my colleague is referring to is to make sure that taxpayers' money is being spent effectively, and we are working with the CBC on this issue.

Let us be clear: during the election campaign, we made a specific promise regarding the CBC. In each of our four budgets, year after year, we have increased the CBC's budget. It is the Bloc Québécois that voted against the proposal.

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THE ECONOMY

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the value of the Canadian dollar rose by 0.7¢ just before the employment numbers were released. There were rumours of a leak. I am not suggesting that the Minister of Finance had anything to do with it, but we should all make it our business to ensure that Canada and the rest of the world can count on the integrity of federal operations.

Will the government launch an independent inquiry into this matter?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can only speak to the involvement of the Department of Finance with respect to the release of information by Statistics Canada. It is released to the department the day before. The employment and unemployment numbers are provided to me as the Minister of Finance the night before and all of that is kept confidential.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Reuters recently lamented the finance minister's now habitual commentary on the employment report on the eve of its release to the public. Last month, Scotiabank warned that this could affect markets, and that is because markets are not stupid. The minister told us to expect big job losses for three months but said nothing this month. It was a giant signal to traders.

Will he stop commenting on his advance copy and stop moving markets?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not comment on employment numbers before the numbers are announced in the morning on the Friday.

Speaking of stupid things, I note that when the member opposite's leader commented about federal taxes and said that "We will have to raise taxes", the member for Markham—Unionville offered his view. He said, "Everyone knows it would be idiotic to raise taxes in the middle of recession". For once I agree with the member for Markham—Unionville.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters has identified seven American bills with buy American clauses. Canadian companies have to relocate to the United States to gain access to the American market. American protectionism is killing Canadian jobs.

Why is this government doing nothing to stem the flow of jobs to the United States?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our

Oral Questions

Prime Minister has taken the lead by asking President Obama to include protection of international treaty obligations in the buy American act. The President did so. We now have a situation in Congress where some people are not going along with the President's wishes. That is why we are concerned about this and working hard to change things.

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is standing by while more U.S. legislation shuts Canada out.

The fact is that state level and local government contracts are not covered by our Canadian trade agreements. The U.S. has asked Canada to change this but that would actually require the Prime Minister to work with the provinces.

When will the Prime Minister show some leadership and work with the provinces to change our trade agreements? When will the Conservatives actually take action to protect Canadians jobs against American protectionism?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where my hon. friend has been on this file. We have been active on it for a number of months and now he has finally seen some concern coming out of the United States.

The Prime Minister led the issue in terms of demanding that buy America legislation contain a clause related to making the Americans live up to their international obligations.

Further to that, congress has taken some steps that we are very concerned about, which is why a number of us, myself included, have been to Washington and have set in motion some actions to have this addressed. We are continuing to follow that up.

* * *

JUSTICE

Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, fortunately for British Columbians, there has been somewhat of a reprieve in the last few weeks with respect to the carnage caused by organized criminals.

This does not, however, mean that anyone of us should let down our guard. We must continue to devise strategies to try to keep one step ahead of those who terrorize our communities.

As this is National Police Week, it is important to remember that we give the police the tools they need to fight crime. Can the Minister of Justice tell us what this government's doing to ensure that we continue to fight organized crime?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the fact that our government, in just the last couple of months, has introduced six pieces of justice legislation, four of which directly target organized crime.

Oral Questions

If we have the attention of the opposition for the next couple of weeks, we should be able to get at least three of those passed before the session ends. I know how difficult that is. The Leader of the Opposition, for instance, was not able to use one word about fighting crime when he addressed the nation in Vancouver a week ago Saturday.

However, that is the difference between our two parties. I am proud to be part of a party that knows that we must fight crime 365 days of the year.

* * *

FISHING INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the east coast of Canada, a perfect storm is developing around the lobster industry. From low catches, to very low prices, to high prices for fuel and so on, the fishermen are facing a very difficult time. In fact, many of them may be tying up their boats this season just because they cannot meet their costs.

One of the solutions for the industry is to allow the fishermen access to EI based on 2008 catches.

Will the government stand in the House today and commit to these fishermen and their families that they will be allowed access to EI so they can cover their cost—

The Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are well aware of the challenges facing the lobster industry. We are in an economic downturn and we expect some challenges in all industries, including this one. We have already taken action to help by improving access to credit, as well as funding some marketing initiatives.

However, we expect that demand will be lower and prices will be lower so we expect the industry to do its part as well.

I continue to work with the provinces, industry, and the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development to work out solutions for this year as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this weekend, the Minister for the Atlantic Gateway promised to help fishers who are facing a significant drop in the price of lobster.

The government recognizes that the price of lobster has to be at least \$4 per pound for the fishery to be viable. With record-low prices of under \$3 per pound, fishers will not be able to hang on for long. They need help right now. They are in crisis.

Will the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans compensate fishers right now and implement measures to ensure the long-term viability of the industry?

• (1450)

[*English*]

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, we are aware of these challenges. When there is an economic downturn and demand and prices are lower, we expect there to be some very

serious challenges. We are monitoring the situation. We are continuing to work with the provinces and industry.

The solution will have to be a partnership of industry and both levels of government. We are working toward that.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a document obtained under the Access to Information Act, we discovered where the Department of National Defence plans to locate the Chinook and Griffon helicopters. The department plans to centralize these aircraft at Petawawa, which will lead to the closure of four squadrons, including the Saint-Hubert and Bagotville squadrons.

Can the Minister of National Defence assure us that this plan is not true and that squadrons will not be shut down in Quebec?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that question.

My answer is yes, it is not true.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in that same document, the Bagotville option is the least expensive. Yet the Minister of National Defence plans to move the Griffons and close 439 Squadron at the Bagotville military base. That decision could mean the loss of 50 jobs at that base.

If the Bagotville option is the least expensive, can the Minister of National Defence explain to the people of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean why he is getting ready to reject that option in favour of Petawawa?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): I repeat, no decision has been made about the location of existing fleets or the aircraft to be purchased in the future.

* * *

[*English*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government was entrusted with \$12 billion in extra funds to quickly and effectively build new infrastructure and employ Canadians. One hundred days later, almost all of the funds are still tied up in the minister's office. The minister is playing political games with the public trust.

Will the minister stop playing games long enough to answer one simple question? How many jobs has he created with the infrastructure stimulus funds so far?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have moved aggressively, making—

Oral Questions

An hon. member: What will you do?

Hon. Peter MacKay: You are nothing.

An hon. member: You sit there and criticize and do nothing.

Hon. John Baird: My goodness, Mr. Speaker. There is quite the banter going back and forth.

The Speaker: Order. I am sure the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities will manage to quiet things down when he starts his answer. We will have a little order in the House, please, so we can all hear the minister in his response.

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, we are working constructively with the provinces and municipalities. Let us look at what the president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities said just last month:

The Government of Canada and all parliamentarians deserve recognition and thanks this week for their ongoing support for this important funding program and the working partnership they have forged with Canada's municipalities.

Step by step we are getting the job done. We eagerly look forward to the June parliamentary report, when we will outline all of the great action we are taking and will continue to take to help provide jobs and create hope and opportunity.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the paper today Jean Perrault had much less kind things to say about a government that has not produced one job in all the time that it has had.

The minister of bluster has a duty. That duty is to the 86,000 more unemployed construction workers over this time last year. He failed them miserably last year and he is failing them now.

Will the minister admit that it is time to change the program to agree with the municipalities and the Canadian Construction Association and use the gas tax transfer to get money out and create jobs right now?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance who doubled funding to municipalities in the gas tax. In addition to that, we gave them July's money this April, getting more money flowing to help provide jobs, hope and opportunity.

Step by step we are getting the job done. We are delivering for Canadian municipalities, but we are not going to simply give all the money to municipalities and push aside the provinces. He wants to push aside Premier Dalton McGuinty and we will not do that.

* * *

•(1455)

CREDIT CARD REGULATIONS

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Friday the Minister of Finance unveiled the Conservative plan to help credit card holders. Not surprisingly, the government's plan is nothing more than an information campaign. Larger fonts and leaflets do not go far enough to help hard-working Canadians through this recession. Consumers do not need another government leaflet to tell them what they already know from looking at their monthly statements.

When will the Minister of Finance stand up for Canadians instead of the big banks on Bay Street?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Canada's economic action plan this year we announced that there would be a regulatory power created for the Minister of Finance with respect to credit cards. The member who just asked the question voted against that provision. There will be regulations coming forward and I hope that he will read them before he decides that he does not like them.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what credit card holders need now is not an information campaign. What they need is relief.

The New Democrats have a plan to deliver real results. Our policy to adopt a credit card accountability act was passed by Parliament. This week representatives from Canadian businesses will be in Ottawa to echo our message on credit cards.

Will the Minister of Finance continue to introduce policies that do not go far enough, or will the government finally listen to the majority of Canadians and retailers, respect Parliament and take real action by adopting the New Democrats' plan?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): In Canada's economic action plan, Mr. Speaker, in the budget this year, we announced we would improve disclosure requirements for credit cards, that we would limit certain business practices that are not beneficial to consumers. We have consulted on these regulations. We have consulted with consumers. We have consulted with the industry. The regulations are being drafted. They will be released shortly.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many of Canada's hockey rinks and other community rec centres were built over four decades ago as part of a special national program to help celebrate Canada's centennial year. Over the past four decades these facilities have served as gathering places for friends, families, neighbours and communities. In towns and communities across our country, Canadians have learned to skate and play hockey in some of these facilities.

Can the Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification tell the House how our government is helping upgrade these facilities while helping Canadians get back to work?

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Canada's economic action plan our government announced a new fund to help upgrade and renew hockey rinks and other community rec centres from coast to coast. We want to ensure that Canadian families will continue to enjoy these facilities. In addition, this fund will put Canadians back to work and help stimulate the economy.

It is one more way our Conservative government is helping guide our country through these challenging economic times.

*Oral Questions***LOBSTER FISHERY**

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I tried to warn the government for the last number of months that the eastern Canadian lobster fishery was heading for a crisis. Well, the crisis is here. Markets have dried up and the prices are at a historic low.

When will the Conservative government realize there is a crisis and provide assistance before the situation worsens? When can eastern Canadians expect some consideration from the government? When will the Prime Minister start standing up for the lobster fishermen in the eastern part of this country?

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is always concerned when fishers are faced with hardship, as the lobster fishermen in P.E.I. and other Atlantic provinces are this year due to the low price. We are continuing to work on this.

We have already taken some action by improving access to credit for harvesters, processors and buyers, and funding for marketing. We are working together with the provinces and industries to come up with a solution.

* * *

[*Translation*]**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Omar Khadr is a child soldier. A child soldier is a child under 18 who is part of an armed group or national army and who may unfortunately have participated in killings. Omar Khadr fits this definition contained in the convention on child soldiers signed by Canada perfectly.

Could the government explain why it is appealing the Federal Court's recent decision ordering the repatriation of Omar Khadr?

• (1500)

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member realizes that the U.S. administration continues to evaluate each of the most serious cases at Guantanamo. He should know that the charges facing Omar Khadr are among the most serious.

It is in Canada's interest to await the outcome of the decisions of the panel.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a year ago the Auditor General blasted the Conservative government for its deficient funding model for the first nations child and family services program. It was not based on the actual cost of delivering services and it did not take into account the needs of first nations communities.

The government was given a year to consult first nations and submit a new funding model. Well, time is up and nothing has happened.

When will the government live up to its responsibility to consult first nations and appropriately fund the child and family services program?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are all concerned that child and family services be delivered not only in a cost effective way, but in a way that puts the child first. That is why we started with the tripartite agreement with first nations from Alberta and the Alberta government. We announced funding in the latest budget to add two more provinces to that list. We have added Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island. We are halfway there.

Obviously, more work needs to be done, but the child and family service issue is being addressed.

* * *

NATIONAL PARKS

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's national parks are world renowned and represent some of our country's most beautiful treasures. Their breathtaking scenery attracts people from around the world and from across our great nation.

In my southern Alberta riding, the rolling plains and picturesque coulees are only further complimented by the glacial mountains, pristine lakes and spectacular waterfalls of Waterton Lakes National Park.

Our national parks give every Canadian the opportunity to learn about our collective history and the chance to explore Canada's natural beauty.

Could the Minister of the Environment please inform the House of the government's recent announcement and how it will benefit Canadian families planning their summer vacations?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has some of the most magnificent and fascinating places in the world. I thank the hon. member for his work on behalf of Waterton. Other national parks such as Torngat, Nahanni, and Grosse Île, where I was on the weekend, come to mind as well.

For many families every dollar counts. We want to protect the time-honoured Canadian tradition of student backpacking adventures and summer family camping trips. To that end, we have frozen fees for all of the national parks and all of our historic sites for two years. This is good for tourism, good for Canadians, and good for our national parks.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the environment minister appears content to be a lap dog of the Americans on climate change.

Routine Proceedings

The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy released a report called, "Achieving 2050: A Carbon Pricing Policy for Canada". It calls on the Conservatives to move quickly on a nationwide policy to meet the government's own climate change strategy.

Will the Conservative government accept the recommendations of its own advisers? Will it finally take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, or is the Conservative plan and targets simply a plan to bamboozle the public and nothing more than hot air?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has been engaged constructively domestically, internationally and continentally with respect to all of the issues relating to climate change, with respect to the long-term nature of our obligations and with respect to technology.

I am sure the hon. member is sincere in her desire to help. I would suggest she talk to her leader. Perhaps she could convince her colleagues not to play tiddlywinks, not to embark on a program of carbon taxes, and to support the government in its efforts.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mr. Pierre DesRuisseaux, the new Poet Laureate of Parliament.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1505)

[*English*]

COMMISSIONER OF LOBBYING

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the certificate of nomination and biographical notes of Karen E. Shepherd, whom the government is proposing to appoint as the Commissioner of Lobbying.

Pursuant to Standing Order 111.1(1), this matter is to be referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

* * *

CANADA-ISRAEL RELATIONS

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations with all parties and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, in the opinion of this House, the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Canada and the State of Israel should be highlighted confirming the deep bond of friendship between the Canadian and Israeli democracies.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: 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)

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, presented on Wednesday, May 6, be concurred in.

Today I will be sharing my time with my hon. friend from New Brunswick and the member of Parliament for Saint John.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to rise here today to support the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans on Canada's seal hunt.

One of the main concerns provoking the debate in Europe and the movement to ban seal products has to do with considerations related to the well-being of the animals. Our government has committed to applying the strictest standards in this area. That is why we are seeking the best scientific advice, and adapting our regulations and licensing criteria based on that advice.

This year was no exception. I am grateful for the opportunity to describe the measures we have taken this year to improve hunting methods, monitoring and oversight. Regulating the seal hunt is a very complex activity undertaken in an ever-changing marine environment in which human safety and the well-being of the animals must be taken into consideration.

[*English*]

It is important at this point in time just to talk a little bit about the motion which actually came out of committee. It is important on the wording. It states:

The Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans fully endorses the harp seal hunt, it approves of current regulated killing methods, approves that the harvesting of harp seals is fully acceptable and that the Canadian harp seal hunt is humane, responsible and sustainable and should continue for generations to come and the Committee strongly condemns the ban of Canadian seal products by the European Union.

I also want to say how pleased I am for the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans to have passed this motion unanimously, by recorded vote.

What is important also to understand is that to enhance the safeness and humaneness of the harvest, our government recently amended the marine mammal regulations and licence conditions that govern the hunt. Changes were made in consultation with sealers, veterinarians, provincial and territorial representatives and others, and they were quickly put in place before the 2009 harp seal hunt. The regulations now reflect the latest scientific advice and enable us to continue adopting sophisticated technology, which will increase our capacity to monitor sealing activities.

Routine Proceedings

The purpose of the regulations has not changed. The regulations continue to spell out the proper tools and methods required for a humane kill. Changes have been implemented, however, in a number of key areas, including definitions to improve clarity, prohibitions against unacceptable behaviour and new requirements regarding the broadly supported three step process: striking, checking for unconsciousness and bleeding. Getting these changes in place in advance of the 2009 harp seal hunt was a significant accomplishment and reflects the goodwill and cooperation of all those involved.

The department has also worked with sealers to develop conditions of licence that work in tandem with the new regulations. Successfully finalizing the licence conditions well ahead of this year's hunt is further evidence of sealers' willingness to work among themselves and with officials in establishing these detailed rules.

The industry has evolved over the past several hundred years or since the early 1700s when the first organized occurrence of an annual hunt was actually documented. This hunt has been going on for well over 500 years and in documented cases of our first nations people well before that, so our people, our fishers and our seal hunters have had to evolve.

Education and training is an important aspect of a professional workforce, especially one that is formally adopting a new set of practices. Training centres reinforce a two year apprenticeship process, whereby new entrants are licensed as apprentice seal harvesters. As apprentice sealers, they must be accompanied by a professional sealer during the course of their apprenticeship. There is significant support among industry representatives for further education and skills development through a training and certification process focused on humane killing. Discussions with stakeholders to create a joint strategy for training and certification are ongoing.

Commitments are in place and efforts are under way at the regional and provincial levels to develop and pilot enhanced training tools and to ensure this work remains part of a broadly supported strategy.

Significant efforts have been made and will continue to be made to ensure that the new rules are clearly understood by sealers throughout Atlantic Canada.

The department has worked with the Atlantic provinces, the Fur Institute of Canada, the Canadian Sealers Association, veterinarians and others to design and deliver information workshops. These have been extremely well received by all stakeholders. They gave departmental officials a chance to engage sealers and others in a dialogue about implementing the new rules.

The government believes in collaboration, and high collaboration was the key to preparing for the 2009 seal hunt. I want to share just a few examples of the collaboration that took place before the 2009 hunt.

DFO and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade partnered to ensure a focused and effective strategy to counter the threat of trade restrictions.

● (1510)

[*Translation*]

Hundreds of meetings have been organized by representatives and ministers with member state ministers, members of the European Parliament and commission officials.

[*English*]

The Canadian Coast Guard, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Quebec Provincial Police are collaborating with Fisheries and Oceans enforcement staff to monitor compliance and to enforce regulations.

[*Translation*]

Government representatives, veterinarians and seal hunters have been working together to develop new regulations.

[*English*]

The Fur Institute of Canada provided its expertise and helped bring sealing leadership together through its seals and sealing network.

Finally, the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters, with support from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, developed a process for further training and eventual certification. The hard work and goodwill demonstrated by participating organizations reflect this shared commitment to a well-managed and professional hunt.

As important as regulations are, it is also important to note that DFO also carries out effective monitoring, control and surveillance programs in Atlantic Canada, including some of the enhanced program operations that were implemented in 2009. We continually make improvements to our monitoring program to ensure compliance with regulations, which results in a humane and sustainable hunt. These actions help dispel the notion the seal hunt is impossible to regulate and manage effectively.

Canada's enforcement of the sealing regulations is thorough and comprehensive. Fully trained professional fisheries officers, designated under Canada's Fisheries Act, closely monitor all commercial and recreational fisheries in Canada, including the seal hunt. Fisheries officers conduct monitoring operations of the seal hunt, using a variety of platforms, including aerial surveillance; vessel monitoring systems, also known as satellite tracking; at-sea patrols and inspections; dock-side landing site patrols and inspections; and inspections of buyer processor sites and facilities. The integration of these different tools and methods enables a well-balanced monitoring and enforcement program.

The Canadian Coast Guard is an integral partner in supporting seal hunt monitoring operations through the use of a dedicated icebreaking vessel from which many of the on-site monitoring activities are coordinated and deployed.

Routine Proceedings

As part of Canada's ongoing initiatives to enhance program delivery, DFO has made several modifications to its strategies for 2009 seal hunt monitoring activities. For this year's hunt, monitoring operations were enhanced by deploying additional shipboard fisheries officers on the dedicated icebreaker. The helicopter surveillance capability was also augmented this year, with the leasing of a private long-range helicopter and remote surveillance technologies; that is, a powerful high-resolution video camera.

To enhance the data, we developed a report to augment the standard inspection data. It contains more observations, including more detailed information on the humane aspect of this harvest.

• (1515)

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, the Government of Canada is mobilizing considerable resources to ensure that the seal hunt remains sustainable and humane.

[*English*]

The Canadian seal industry is supported by a professional workforce committed to upholding a high standard with regard to animal welfare.

We invited the world to watch the 2009 hunt, and this year's hunt has demonstrated Canada's leadership among sealing nations.

We support an industry that is humane and sustainable, a harvest that reflects the best interests of all fishers, a harvest that has officially gone on for over 300 years, a harvest that is so critical to our small rural communities and our Inuit people.

We strongly condemn the ban of Canadian seal products by the European Union.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, who sits on the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, quite rightly pointed out that this motion did indeed flow from that committee during our deliberations and there was indeed a unanimous vote by all committee members in support of this motion.

Would my the hon. member please explain to the House the power and the influence that should have on the European Union community when it explores or tries to understand the position of Canadian parliamentarians on that particular issue?

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, the fisheries and oceans committee is a great committee to work on because, generally, we can get that consensus on reports. I think everybody understands the importance of the fishing industry to all of us. Even though I represent an inland riding, I represent a rural riding, I do understand the importance of these rural ridings and the importance of these types of industries to them.

I do concur with my hon. friend that when all the members of a committee get together and we do not have a dissident report, maybe is the best way to put it, that has tremendous leverage for the government. It is also important because it gives us reinforcements. When we get someone like Norway's foreign minister indicating that the Norwegian government has decided to initiate consultations under the WTO dispute settlement mechanism should the EU take a decision on the lines it now seems to be developing, that is a great

thing for us as a government because this is the power that we can all get behind.

• (1520)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank my colleague. I think there are many misperceptions out there in terms of the seal hunt, the humanity and the sustainability, and what he has done is clearly articulate the regulations and the number of changes that have been made.

I would ask my colleague to talk a little bit further, because the consultation process that created all those changes was very important and I think it is worth hearing some details around the process by which we have new regulations.

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, it is really great sitting in on the fisheries committee when we get a chance to talk about these issues and about how important this industry is.

As to how that fishery has evolved, I think the first organized hunt was in 1723. It has evolved over almost 300 years. DFO has worked very hard with the fishers and the seal hunters to actually engage them in this process. I think the apprenticeship program is very important. It just underscores how important the consultation process is and how important it is that the government wants to work with the sealers to understand what is going on in these small communities, but also to work hard to make sure that we can sustain this harvest for generations to come.

We all know this harvest is sustainable, and it really has to be developed for all fishers concerned, because at the end of the day, just looking at what the seals eat, they eat other fish. So it is important for a long-range, sustainable hunt, and for all fishers, that we continue to work with the sealers to ensure this harvest for many years to come.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise a question of great significance to establishing a strategy for the present and for the future. It concerns an information and awareness program in Europe.

Does the member concur with me and other members that our main challenge, in addition to the demagoguery and disinformation of abolitionists, is to reach the population as a whole? The only means of achieving this is to mount an information and awareness campaign.

The Speaker: The hon. member must be brief.

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[*English*]

I am working with this member on the fisheries committee, and he is right: At the end of the day, there is a tremendous amount of information out there, wrong as it is, that is against the harvest.

It is interesting what Rebecca Aldworth, no friend of the seal hunt, by the way, as members will know, said in her comments on May 5. She said:

The Canadian government used every trick in the book to try to derail the ban: massive lobbying, misinformation, and even threats of trade reprisals.

Routine Proceedings

I think there has been a tremendous amount of effort from our parliamentarians, and on that front as well, which would suggest that there has been a tremendous amount of lobbying and information put out there. However, I would also say to this member: The information we are putting out there is correct, and hers is wrong.

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague, the member for Tobique—Mactaquac, for sharing his time with me today on this very important issue.

I want again to state unequivocally that I support the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans and the statement that it made:

[T]he Canadian harp seal hunt is humane, responsible and sustainable and should continue for generations to come and the Committee strongly condemns the ban of Canadian seal products by the European Union.

I call on all Canadian parliamentarians to do the same.

Unfortunately, that will not be the case. Liberal Senator Mac Harb has already staked his ground on this issue and it is against the industry and against his fellow Canadians.

Senator Harb has chosen campaigns of fear, misinformation and emotional argument, over his fellow Canadians in the sealing industry. This is very disappointing but not entirely surprising.

Why is it not surprising? It is because this is an issue that the Leader of the Liberal Party has been silent on as well. He has not said a word, not one, none.

While the Leader of the Liberal Party has refused to tell the sealing industry what his position on the seal hunt is, his Liberal senator, Mac Harb, has run amok, working to destroy the sealing industry along with Canada's position and credibility internationally. The only person who can stop Mac Harb is the Leader of the Liberal Party, yet he has not done a thing.

For sealers in Newfoundland and Labrador and in Quebec, this must be tragically disappointing. For generations, sealing has been part of the fabric of Canada's east coast. All that these great men and women can do, who depend on the seal hunt for income, is watch the Liberal senator try to destroy their livelihood to make his European friends happy. After all, Senator Harb called these great Canadians barbaric. Shame on him!

I can tell the House that our government will do everything it can to deny Senator Harb any success on this issue. We are standing with the sealers and their families and we will be resolute in our support.

I am particularly disappointed with this ill-advised decision by the members of the European Union, because they know that it is the wrong decision. European parliamentarians are playing a political game with people's lives, fueled by misinformation and fact twisting by many people, such as Senator Harb. They know perfectly well that public opinion in Europe has been manipulated by radical animal rights organizations to the point where the public believes completely misleading and unfounded claims about Canada's seal hunt.

How do the members of the European Union know deep down that they made a wrong decision? We have told them. Over and over again we have told the European decision-makers that they are wrong to trust the information funnelled to them from Rebecca

Aldworth and the Humane Society of the United States. We have repeatedly told them how the Canadian hunt is well managed and well regulated.

Sealers have come with us to talk about the importance of the hunt to their traditions and about how they respect the animals on which they depend for their livelihood and that of their families and their communities.

We have explained further that unilateral measures are not the answer and that the radical animal rights advocates will tell them anything to get this ban in place, whether it is true or not. However, European parliamentarians refuse to listen.

They refuse to listen because the environment has been poisoned by propaganda campaigns mounted by radical animal rights organizations. For over 40 years, radical animal rights organizations have maligning the Canadian sealing industry with vicious propaganda. The worst aspect is their myth about skinning seals alive.

In some circles, this myth is accepted as fact. Their multi-million dollar campaigns against the sealing industry spreads lies and propaganda to a point that no one familiar with the industry knows what is fact and what is fiction.

How do they do this? I will give an example. In 2002 and 2007, two radical animal rights organizations commissioned illegitimate studies on the seal hunt. These studies were in fact no such thing.

● (1525)

The participants went out to find what they were looking for, and lo and behold, they did. One concluded on the basis of an examination of 76—yes, that is right, 76 seals—that the hunt was inhumane.

Other scientists routinely examine thousands of skulls without arriving at such a conclusion. In fact, they conclude the opposite, that the Canadian seal hunt is humane.

The results of these so-called studies are now quoted routinely to perpetuate the myth that the Canadian seal hunt is inhumane. The written declaration of European Union parliamentarians use one of these studies to justify demanding a ban on seal products. Here is where the real irony comes in.

The European Food Safety Authority, which is the organization commissioned by the European commission to study animal welfare aspects of sealing, has said in no uncertain terms that the results of the so-called studies are not reliable. It said:

it is incorrect to conclude that 42% of the seals in the sample were skinned alive....

Further:

it is not appropriate to extrapolate from a small sample of 76 skulls collected in the Gulf of St. Lawrence over two days to all the animals killed during the entire hunt, which is conducted over several weeks....

Routine Proceedings

Still the Europeans persist. They refuse to accept the opinions of their own experts. I do not understand it. It is beyond my comprehension.

At this point, I wish to thank my colleagues, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of International Trade and the officials who have worked tirelessly to advocate for Canada on this most challenging of issues. I would particularly like to draw to everyone's attention the efforts of the Ambassador for Fisheries Conservation, Loyola Sullivan, whose record of achievement on this file is both extraordinary and commendable.

Our strenuous efforts to communicate with European decision-makers have included letters, telephone calls, delegations, speeches, an article in the European media, position papers and advertisements. We have written letters, and when I say "we", I mean the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of International Trade, the Ambassador for Fisheries Conservation and the 28 ambassadors who represent Canada to the European Union and to the member states of the European Union.

We have written to our European counterparts. We have written to the members of the European Parliament. We invited key members to visit Canada. They did not come. Officials of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans emailed all 785 members of the European Parliament an advertisement we had placed in the European media. This was followed up by the diplomatic missions in the member states.

We have made telephone calls minister to minister, official to official. We have made interventions in meetings with European counterparts. Most notably, the Prime Minister has spoken to European presidents and prime ministers on several occasions. We have done everything possible to counter the movement to ban seal products in Europe.

I recently read an article containing an accusation made by some members of the European Parliament. They say that intimidation tactics were used in order to secure a vote in favour of a ban. Disturbing, yes; surprising, no. If this is true, it takes this matter to a whole new level.

These radicals and professional campaigners will do anything, and I mean anything, to achieve their misguided goals. They threaten; they intimidate; they use their vast resources to pound on an unsuspecting public their version of the truth.

What I say next I do not say lightly. These radical animal rights advocates, like Paul Watson from the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, advocate the use of violence and terrorist-like tactics in their campaigns. For example, Watson said, "The fact is that we live in an extremely violent culture and we all justify violence if it's for what we believe in".

In my society it does not. That quote goes to show how deluded and out of touch these people are.

Another is Jerry Vlasak, who has been outright banned from several countries. He is a cohort of Watson and is the biggest proponent of violence of any radical. He said, "You can justify, from a political standpoint, any type of violence you want to use".

That is sick but yet another example of the kind of philosophy that drives these people. The sad thing is that deep down they all believe it to be true.

• (1530)

I read something that I found quite amusing, and I would like to share it with the hon. members today. During an interview—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member. He may be able to add some comments in response to questions and comments.

The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, his last comment was "during an interview". That is a very good way to end, because I can pick up on that.

On May 9, *The Daily Telegraph*, one of the largest papers in Great Britain, had an interview with the Leader of the Opposition. In this article, the leader of the Liberal Party said:

We look at the culling of deer in Scotland and wolves in Europe by farmers and find it very frustrating to see this reaction to a carefully regulated and managed cull here... "Europe's inability or refusal to see the seal cull for what is smacks of hypocrisy and misunderstanding. "Paul McCartney, I love your music—but leave the seals to the people who know them. This is not marginal to us..."

To me, that does not sound like not saying anything. This is one of the largest publications in Great Britain. Would he like to retract his statement about not saying anything, or would the hon. member from St. John agree with the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada in his assessment of just how well managed our hunt is?

• (1535)

Mr. Rodney Weston: Madam Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition made those statements, I retract my statement when I said that the member has sat silent on it.

As I said earlier, it takes all voices together. I call upon all parliamentarians to stand united and to take this issue to all Canadians to ensure they and Europeans understand how important this seal hunt is to the families in our communities and to the livelihoods of these families. It is so important that we all speak united today, and that is my point in this statement.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like my colleague, who is chair of the committee and a member of this Parliament, to set aside his partisanship to the extent possible. I understand that one may be partisan to a certain extent; however, I have the impression that it can be readily modified.

In his speech, my colleague referred two or three times to Mac Harb in the span of a few minutes. However, he is but one senator and I have had the opportunity to meet with him to try to make him understand certain things. I learned that Senator Harb wanted his five minutes of glory and he got them. But that is enough and that is the end of it.

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Starting now, what strategy would my colleague advise that the government and others adopt to counter the enormous challenge posed by 30 years of demagoguery and misinformation?

[*English*]

Mr. Rodney Weston: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague is quite right. We sit on the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans together. I want to point out very clearly that I appreciate the position of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans and how clear it has been in its commitment to the seal hunt.

As parliamentarians in the House, it is very important that we clearly demonstrate this. That is what this debate is about today. We need to show Europeans and the world beyond our borders how important it is that we stand united on this point. Parliamentarians have taken that bold step. We passed the motion unanimously, condemning the action of the European Union. It is very important that we remain united, go forward united and come up with a plan to challenge this.

The Prime Minister is very convinced in his strategy to go to the World Trade Organization. There has been great leadership by our ministers. I believe we are on the right track, but staying united is number one.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

My remarks are reflected very well and very strongly by all members, especially Liberal members from Newfoundland and Labrador, including the members for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Avalon, Random—Burin—St. George's as well as Labrador. My colleague from Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor will be offering his perspectives.

Obviously there can be certain confusion around this issue. The seal hunt was first prosecuted by Europeans. The seal hunt provided the oil for industry of Europe. It not only provided the entire capacity for the streets of London to be lit at night, but it created millions and millions of dollars, pounds, marks or whatever European currency in wealth. The seal hunt was created by Europeans and had its foundations, but the seal hunt that we know was prosecuted well before that by first nations, by our aboriginal peoples, for food, social and ceremonial purposes and for the necessities of life. This industry is founded in sustainability. It has also provided untold wealth for the Europeans who first exploited it, those who now judge it.

There can understandably be some confusion in the European position. The fact is the position taken by the European Parliament, and Canadians and European parliamentarians need to understand this, provides an exemption for a continuing ongoing cull of seals for no food, social or ceremonial purpose and for no commercial purpose whatsoever within Europe.

In Sweden, for example, 35,000 grey seals will be culled because of their impact on some other aspect of the local ecosystem. They will be culled and thrown into the ocean, not used for food, for commerce or any particular purpose other than the strict purpose of a cull. The European Parliament has fully endorsed that position.

One can understand that there is certain confusion coming out of Europe, when we consider the fact that 70 million rabbits will be hung up by the back legs in France. While they are still very much alive, their throats will be slit and they will be bled out.

Other practices in the Faroe Islands, where it is a rite of passage to manhood for young men to slaughter countless numbers of whales, is fully sanctioned and condoned by the European Union.

One can understand the frustration that wells in the heart of anyone who comes from a sealing community or whose family depends on a sealing income to put food on the table and to make ends meet.

We need to get down to what the seal hunt truly is. It is a fully sustainable harvest, conducted humanely, not judged by the MP for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, but judged so by an international committee on veterinarian scientists.

In terms of the sustainability of this industry, the World Wildlife Fund, the WWF, on its website says that at a population in excess of 5.5 million harp seals, at which the population currently stands, there are no sustainability issues that it questions.

For those who deem an income from this activity, it allows them an opportunity to create wealth and food and to market a product at no consequence. There is no pollution that comes from this industry. It is done in complete balance with the ecosystem. It produces a fully sustainable, natural product. This is a good industry, but those who promote against it are mis-intentioned.

Even Paul Watson, head of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, in an interview not too long ago, criticized the IFAW. He criticized Greenpeace. He said that it went after this issue as if it were an environmental issue. He said, in no uncertain terms, that this had nothing to do with the environment, that this was not about the colour green of the environment, it was about the colour green of money.

● (1540)

Paul Watson is acknowledging that this has nothing to do with the environment, that this is not an argument of merit, this is an argument about making money for organizations that promote against it. He criticized the International Fund for Animal Welfare. He criticized Greenpeace. He asked why it doing this, why it was misplacing so much emphasis and energy on communicating something which is not an environmental issue. He said, in answer to his own question, "It's because they are making millions of dollars off of it", and he criticized that. He said real issues facing the environment, like the situation of turtles off the coast of Mexico or endangered fish stocks in other parts of the world, would lose attention because of the efforts, the activities and the false propaganda put forward by the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the Greenpeace society and others at that time.

Guess who is one of the leading forefronts of that misinformation that he, himself, acknowledged? Paul Watson. I guess the money is just a little too tempting.

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One can understand what the frustrations are and where they are sourced. The Europeans themselves do not believe in what they are doing. The European Union has been very misguided. It has shown an immaturity by not listening to the facts. It is a young, fledgling democracy.

One has to communicate that very deliberately to the European Union, because it did not listen to the international veterinary scientists who formed a committee, who studied this issue and who came to the conclusion that the Canadian harp seal harvest was very much a sustainable harvest. It did not listen to organizations like the World Wildlife Fund, which said that this was a very sustainable harvest. It did not listen to the organizations that have a true stake in this.

I do not know what the European parliamentarians listened to, but they certainly did not listen to the truth. They listened to something else and that is very disturbing, especially as we enter a very sensitive and important time for Canadian interests in Europe.

The Prime Minister was recently in Prague, where he announced that we would formally engage in a fleshing out the Canada-European free trade agreement. The Prime Minister said that while the seal hunt was important to him, it was not worth jeopardizing or poisoning the Canada-EU talks.

A very well-read and well-reasoned commentator, Rex Murphy, recently said this about the Prime Minister's comments. He said that if the seal hunt was not worth jeopardizing Canada-EU trade for Canada, why was it worth jeopardizing Canada-EU trade for the European Union? If the European Union was prepared to engage in illegal trade activity at the very dawn of potential Canada-EU free trade talks, how valuable does it see the Canadian trading relationship? That is exactly what it should have done.

The Prime Minister should have communicated that to his European colleagues, not only on that occasion but on the occasion of the G20 summit. The G20 met in Europe not too long ago, on April 1 and 2. The purpose of the G20 summit was to ensure that G20 member states did not engage in any trade activity or practice that could jeopardize lawful trading activity. If they invoked illegal trade bans or trade barriers, it could cause the world to cascade into further recession if not depression.

While our Prime Minister was attending that G20 summit just weeks ago with his European colleagues, the Chancellor of Germany, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, the President of France, the ink was drying on the draft EU legislation that would basically create an illegal trade activity.

• (1545)

Action must be taken. Every tool must be used by the government to combat this illegal ban. The government needs to do more, and we will continue to press the government to do so.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fisheries critic for the Liberal Party speaks with great passion on this. I know he comes from Newfoundland, where this hits closer to home than for those of us from British Columbia, for example. I appreciate his sharing in this way.

What we were waiting for was a statement from his leader before the vote of the EU Parliament and a comment about the position of one of his caucus members. We thought that was a reasonable expectation.

The member ended his speech by saying he is going to press the government to do more. I would like to give him the opportunity to flesh that out a bit. What advice does he have for us? What does he think we should be doing from this point on?

• (1550)

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Madam Speaker, one thing that could show a sign of hope and good faith to the sealers from the northeast coast of Newfoundland and Labrador to the northern peninsulas of Labrador is to make good on a promise.

Fishermen face severe circumstances, such as a lack of employment and a lack of income due to the ice conditions found on those shores. Almost all of them are sealers. The Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development promised that she would provide adequate and appropriate compensation, income support to those fishermen. That would be a great place to start.

However, another great place to start would be at the European Union. We need to say loudly and forcefully in the midst of the Canada-EU free trade talks that beginning these talks in the wake of an illegal trade ban by the European Union does not serve the cause of collaboration and bilateralism very well. Our Prime Minister needs to say that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Madam Speaker, the question is quite simple. I will ask it outright because I believe that it is the key to success in this matter.

As long as Europeans or others who wish to listen hear only demagoguery and misinformation, there is a huge risk. We have arrived at a crossroads with respect to the 2010 season and subsequent hunts but, at the same time, we see that for some 30 years there has been no response or rebuttal. There was no message about the seal hunt other than the abolitionists' misinformation and demagoguery.

Does my colleague agree that we must reach these people because it is the key to success and the truth?

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Madam Speaker, I would truly like to thank my colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine for his leadership and input and involvement in this particular issue. Coming from a sealing riding himself, he understands the task we all face. He also understands many of the solutions.

Categorically, the answer is yes. We need to triple the efforts to get the correct message out. We need to counter the negative, incorrect, factually misleading messages that have been put forward by certain animal rights activists in their quest for dollars from people who accept the misinformation. I am sure those people can indeed accept the truth once it is offered to them.

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We need to do more, but we certainly have a wonderful opportunity ahead of us, if we use it correctly. If the European Union genuinely wants to engage in more free, legal, rules-based trade with Canada, they can start immediately. They can be told by our government that the trade ban on Canadian seal products is deemed by every international trade expert to be illegal. It is contrary to the G20 summit declaration, contrary to the best interests of the world economy, and it must not be allowed to continue. That could happen now.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the House for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I would also like to thank my colleague from Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte for sharing his time with me. I look forward to all the questions and comments from my colleagues in the House as we stand united on this issue.

One of the topics my colleague brought up was the history of the seal harvest and how it dates back centuries ago.

The genesis of the animal rights protest groups several decades ago was the IFAW, the International Fund for Animal Welfare. A lot of these protest groups are situated in Great Britain. I find it somewhat ironic that many centuries ago one of the main reasons for harvesting seals was to get the oil from the carcass to light the street lamps of London. More of these details can be found in a book called *The Ice Hunters*, by Dr. Shannon Ryan. Anyone who is interested in this topic should pick up a copy of this book. It provides great detail on the past.

Speaking of history and tradition, I received word today about a group in the town of Elliston that is hoping to have a seal hunters' museum in the northeast end of the town. That was a makeshift area for dealing with many people who died during the harvest.

When the harvest took place years ago, much larger boats were used. People would sign up to go out on these large schooners. We have heard countless tales of tragedy on the ice. There is one celebrated book called *Death on the Ice*, which talks about sealers who were stranded on the open water. They died, mostly due to exposure. The stories and traditions will continue.

We heard countless hours of debate in the House last week on this very same issue. We have come to the realization that seal hunting is a basic pillar of the history and tradition of the east coast of Newfoundland and Labrador in particular, but for other areas as well, such as Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine and Nunavut.

This started with the Council of Europe, in Strasbourg, France. A motion was delivered to its home nations banning the importation of seal products derived from the harvesting of seals. By doing so the council hoped to discontinue the harvest that takes place in Canada.

The odd part is that the wording in the motion dealt with Canada. Canada was being singled out. Right away, we could smell the politics in this, because the council did not seem to be picking on its own. There is evidence today that Russia still hunts white coat seals, which we abandoned in 1987. Norway also has a seal harvest. It has one for tourists as well. People can pay their money and harvest seals without any training whatsoever. Yet all this was seemingly absent from the debate that started in Europe.

There was miscommunication, or blatant misrepresentation in many cases, on the part of the animal rights group. It seemed that the politicians really wanted to go after Canada on this issue.

That brings us to the European Union, which has put forward something from the European Commission telling it how to deal with this issue. Some of my government colleagues have brought up the names of some organizations that brought this situation to the fore in Europe, such as EFSA, the European Food Safety Authority. It made some recommendations whereby seal products could be banned if they were harvested inhumanely, but evidence must be provided upon which the decision is made.

This was brought forward to members of the European Parliament, where the internal markets committee took over. Belgium and the Netherlands had already started their own ban. Something has also been tabled recently in Germany. They needed to have pan-European legislation regulating seal products for all 27 nations.

● (1555)

In this particular case, they put it to a vote in the House. But before that, they went to the committee. The internal markets committee, the rapporteur of this report, suggested that they do labelling and that they allow the importation of seal products that were harvested humanely. Lo and behold, there was one particular member of the European Parliament, from Denmark, who enlisted the support of 20 of the 27 committee members to overturn that exemption and have an outright ban, with one exception for a small hunt for the Inuit.

The lawyers then became involved in the European Union. The legal counsel of the internal markets committee told them that if they did this they would face a challenge. As my hon. colleague from the west coast of Newfoundland pointed out, it is illegal. They told him point blank that this was an illegal ban.

The member from Denmark stated in the committee, "No, it is not about trade or legalities. This is a moral issue, and this is a political issue". Why is it a political issue? Because come early June, the members of the European Parliament have elections. The irony is that they accuse us of playing politics with it. Well, this is pure and simple politics.

My colleague pointed out what Rex Murphy said, which was a very valid point. If the onus is on us to say we should not be talking about this now because it might upset European trade talks, maybe that is a question they should have asked themselves. We are not the ones throwing this in jeopardy; they are.

Why is it always about Canada? I will go on record, right here, right now, and say that we have the most regulated, humane seal harvest, mammal harvest in the world. Yet, we are the target of the animal rights groups, always.

That is the issue we come down to. That is why we have to make a point of saying that enough is enough and now we will turn the light around. We should say to the European Union, “So, exactly what do you harvest? What about those wolves that you cull? What about the fact that you harvest over 30,000 grey seals in Sweden?” What about the fact that there are so many of what they call “nuisance species” around the world that they cull for the sake of getting rid of them? If they kill wolves because there are too many wolves and it upsets the population, what do they do with the wolf when it dies? What happens to that carcass?

Nobody asks these questions. If we went to Barcelona and watched a bull fight, chances are that bull will die at the end of that particular event. What happens to that bull? Has anybody asked?

Where is Paul McCartney asking about this? Where is Brigitte Bardot? I do not see Brigitte Bardot showing up in the middle of a bull ring, maybe because she is smart, but she does not appear. Yet time and time again she returns to the ice floe.

Why is this place a target? It is time for us to take the spotlight, take the target, and shine it there. They told me that sometimes that argument does not work, but what is working? I implore all members of the House to look at this issue and refocus.

Biodiversity is addressed in the United Nations, and it is something we adhere to as part of the seal harvest. For instance, clause 3 of the United Nations convention on biological diversity recognizes that “sovereign right of states to exploit their own resources in accordance with their environmental policies”.

That is the United Nations. The United Nations will say yes to this because we have adhered to all the principles by which a sustainable harvest can be maintained. Yet we find ourselves on the defensive.

Let us broaden this argument. Let us say to the world that it should harvest animals for the sake of biodiversity. Let us set the rules straight. If they do not want to harvest animals, then there is no argument here. But they do, and there is an argument. We are being singled out.

I want to thank the members of this House for allowing me to speak. I want to thank the government side as well as the opposition, who are united in this particular cause.

• (1600)

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the history on this because he has a tremendous amount of knowledge on how this has evolved over time.

We have talked about the humaneness and the ecodiversity. One of the things the Europeans talked about was, putting aside the Inuit, still allowing by labelling and allowing that to come in when in fact everybody who practises the seal hunt in Canada uses the same methods.

Would the member comment on the hypocrisy and ludicrousness of that statement?

• (1605)

Mr. Scott Simms: Madam Speaker, the member raises a very good point.

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I will illustrate it with a quick story. We had a meeting in Ottawa with members of the European parliament. At the time, I said that to absolutely negate the seal hunt that takes place on the east coast of the country is wrong.

[*Translation*]

This is really important to Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec's east coast, and the Magdalen Islands.

[*English*]

I asked him whether he felt that tradition played into this, our tradition of a commercial seal harvest on the east coast. He said that he would not argue about traditions in the European Union because there were a lot of traditions that it was trying to get rid of. I told him to wait a minute. I said that the European Union had made an exemption for the Inuit based on tradition alone.

We understand what the European Union is saying about Inuit traditions and, absolutely, that should be enshrined in this as an exemption. However, what about our exemption as well? The hypocrisy runs so deep. I thank my hon. colleague for pointing that out because it is a very valid point of just how twisted this European political argument has become.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity to participate in a mission to Europe with the Liberal member who just spoke. Any time we talked to Europeans or to parliamentarians, it was scary to see how deeply their thinking had been contaminated. Here is an example. Recently, the Magdalen Islands community radio station talked to a Swiss journalist. The journalist said that the seal hunt, as practised in Quebec and Canada, was senseless because the hunters killed the animals with hammers and baseball bats and so on. He had no idea about tradition and the *hacapik*. The grandstanding and disinformation persist even though we have been trying to get the truth out for years.

This goes to show that we will have to conduct a massive campaign. Does the member agree?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms: Madam Speaker, I am glad my hon. colleague raised that point. When he and I were in Paris, we made what we thought was a compassionate argument. The word “barbarians” was thrown around. However, some members of parliament who were there expressed concern and asked that another look be taken at what we do. We cull animals. In other words, we take nuisance species out of the population. How do we do it? Nobody knows.

I do not know if the member remembers, but one British member of parliament actually stated to the rapporteur, “You know, in my park in my constituency, in my riding, we kill deer. I don't know how we do it, but if we ran into this park with clubs and started clubbing them to death, we'd probably have a big situation on our hands”. Maybe that is what they do. They just do not know.

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However, I want to talk about the hakapik. Even the Independent veterinarians' group has stated that the hakapik is a humane way of hunting. When we talk about the Europeans using this, a small part of the hunting population does use hakapiks, but at the same time it has been proven to be humane.

We must remember that these animal rights groups want to eliminate the hunt, period. It has nothing to do with the type of mechanism. It will keep using words like “hammers” and “baseball bats” and it is absolutely ludicrous.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Madam Speaker, once again, the seal hunt is at the forefront of our debate here in the House of Commons. I say once again, but at the same time, I would like to say how disappointed I am that we are here today to talk about a decision that was just made in Europe. Yet everyone recognizes—and even some European parliamentarians recognize—that the decision was made based on the demagoguery and misinformation that has been circulating for some 30 years.

That is why people in my riding are extremely disappointed and frustrated by what is happening. People are perhaps even beginning to wonder if they too should not boycott Europe and cancel our planned trips, boycott French wine and Spanish wine, and so on, because what is going on right now is so appalling.

These people are parliamentarians who, like us, were elected and who will soon be heading to the polls. The elections begin on June 4. In fact, that is one of the major problems. They are going into an election, and are in pre-election mode. I do not think it is the same situation as here, or that these parliamentarians need to stand up and declare whether they agree with a certain measure or not.

I have a feeling it is just an automatic reflex—as some would say—and people are therefore becoming somewhat insensitive, but above all, oblivious to the decision that was just made in Europe. It is disappointing, it is frustrating and it is appalling that a Parliament, and one that is so young, has made such a decision.

Ultimately, it is a black eye in its history. That Parliament has made a decision based on the prevailing misinformation and demagoguery, and those who want the ban have considerable financial backing. They are highly intelligent, but they are using their intelligence for the wrong cause and they are consciously using it for destructive, and not constructive purposes. People in my riding are furious and I do not blame them one bit.

Now, how should we behave towards a parliamentarian who consciously decides to vote in favour of banning and boycotting seal products based on misinformation and demagoguery?

That is exactly what is happening, and that is why I feel it is important today to look at how all this has come about. We can use a scholarly word, anthropomorphism, which, in much simpler terms, means humanizing animals. People have succeeded in humanizing seals to the point where we talk about the “baby seal” and the “mother seal”. If this goes any further we will be talking about the father, the cousins and the extended family. It is as silly as that. It is also as dangerous as that.

People have succeeded in humanizing an animal to such a degree that they have aroused sympathy. Those who have seen whitecoats will agree that they are extremely cute. They are very cute, just as calves, lambs or even chickens could be considered cute. But we must not forget that we eat these animals. This is what is happening. We have gotten to this point because of a cute image and experts in demagoguery and disinformation who have the means to sway public opinion.

Speaking of means, the 2007 financial statements of the IFAW and the Humane Society show that these international organizations each raised \$100 million U.S. in donations from individuals.

• (1610)

They make this money available to people who earn good salaries. Rebecca Aldworth, one of the people we have to fight, says anything and is a real liar about what is happening at present. I had the opportunity to tell her to her face what I think, and I called her a liar. We are at the point where we must no longer handle these people with kid gloves. We have to agree to say things to their face convincingly, but also respectfully.

I have no problem debating someone who feels that seal hunting makes no sense or that the hunt is not good and should be discontinued. That is an intelligent sort of debate. I am willing to respect someone who tells me that they are a vegetarian who does not eat meat and that they are against the hunt on those grounds. I respect them because I sense in their attitude and in what they say that they respect me as well and that they respect tradition.

This is a tradition, especially in the Magdalen Islands, the riding and the people I represent. I expect it is the same for people in Quebec, Labrador and Newfoundland, not to mention the Inuit of the far north. The seal hunt did not start all of a sudden just a few years ago because sealskin or fur became popular. Magdalen Islanders have been hunting seal for over 300 years. It is ancestral, traditional, perhaps even genetic. People have made that very clear to me.

I had a chance to participate, but I have not yet hunted seal. Perhaps I will do so one day to show my support. The end of March symbolizes a time of renewal for these people. The ice moves, and people know that spring is on its way. Spring in early April means fishing for shrimp. Then, in early May, people fish for lobster, crab and groundfish. It is traditional. Historically, seals and other animals were hunted for their meat and fur, but also for seal oil, which has various uses. Later on, I will talk more about things that can be done now that were not done historically, things that suggest the seal hunt can be viewed not only from the perspective of tradition and ancestral rights, but from another perspective too.

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About thirty years ago, some visitors arrived with poor intentions but with a very good sense of spectacle. The people who experienced this told me about it. The visitors asked seal hunters in the Magdalen Islands if they could photograph and film them in action. To ensure that the action was vivid enough, they asked the hunters to hit the animals several times and, even if the animal was dead, to continue hitting it with the hakapik. By the way, a hakapik is a club with a hook that is not used to kill the animal. It is used by the hunter to protect himself when on the ice and also to drag the carcass to the boat. There is another projection on the opposite side from the hook.

• (1615)

It is a piece of rectangular iron that is not very thick and is used to crush the seal's skull so that the animal suffers as little as possible. It is designed for that purpose. Although using a rifle may seem easier and cleaner, would you use one on a boat? The ocean causes the boat to rock, making it difficult to hit the target.

The hakapik is a heritage tool still used in the Magdalen Islands. I have described how it is used. At that time, the hunter had already killed the animal. He was being filmed and they asked him to strike some additional blows. These same images were used in Brigitte Bardot's first campaign. The person who asked the hunter to appear in the film knew very well why he asked the hunter to hit the seal again. It was to make the hunt seem savage and cruel and to imply that the hunter was striking the animal again simply to vent his frustration or who knows for what other reason. It created a very bad image. That was the image used by Brigitte Bardot to launch her campaign against the hunt. That is the same image we have seen over and over again.

Recently, in 2007, the famous Rebecca Aldworth, whom I mentioned earlier, also showed up on the ice off the Magdalen Islands to take pictures. At one point, she saw a bloody seal that was not yet dead. For 20 minutes, she filmed that suffering animal, never thinking for a second to put an end to its agony by killing it.

The very same abolitionists, the very same people who condemn cruelty, used pictures, and because they needed those pictures, they acted cruelly. We need to remember that as well. That is part of the game. These people are willing to do anything.

The seal hunt is like an open-air abattoir. Do I need to say it again? I defy anyone who visits that abattoir to tell me he or she loved it, unless that person is cold-blooded and lacking common sense. That is what is happening at present. The hunt is an open-air abattoir, which makes it very difficult for us to fight these people with pictures, especially when they will use anything in any way they can just to get money from people who, when they see these pictures, say that the hunt makes no sense.

This is what we are up against, and it has been going on for 30 years, since the 1970s. That is where we are at. Today, the abolitionists are claiming victory. I feel they are claiming victory on the basis of demagoguery and disinformation. I have always said, and I will say it again, that one day the truth will prevail. That is the only way to deal with this situation. For the truth to prevail, it must be known and recognized. That is why we must engage in a huge information and promotion campaign in Europe and elsewhere. We must not forget that the United States has the Marine Mammal

Protection Act, which states that the harp seal is an endangered species.

• (1620)

Yet, in 1970, there were 2 million harp seals, compared to about 6 million now. The species is not in danger, as the numbers show. These numbers were not made up. They are the result of a scientific analysis. In fact, those numbers may be even higher, because we are just talking about the harp seal, the one that is currently being killed and which is the subject of campaigns.

However, we do not hear as much about the grey seal, which is two to three times bigger, which eats more, and which is present in our rivers. Indeed, the grey seal is now present in our rivers, where we also find salmon and trout. This is what is happening right now. That same grey seal eats lobster and crab. In fact, it loves good food. I have no problem with that, but let us just say that there are a few too many of them. For example, it will often eat only part of a cod, because it likes that part better than the rest.

Personally, I love cod. I am the son of a fisher and cod is in my genes. It tastes very good, from head to tail, and it can be cooked in various ways.

Both the grey seal and the harp seal are big eaters. They do not eat peanuts or whatever: they eat products from the sea. Grey seals, which are a lot bigger, reproduce in very large numbers. I saw some of them not that long ago—last year—and I photographed them. There were about 30 grey seals, positioned very close to a fish plant, waiting to eat what was left from the processing, and also eating what was available in the water.

Seal can be eaten in various forms, such as rillettes and terrines, or it can be smoked. It is delicious. It can also be prepared in a number of ways. I even had the opportunity to eat it as a hamburger. I thought it did not make sense, because a hamburger is not seal, but it was just as tasty. So, it can be eaten.

We also know that the fur can be used. I did not bring the seal fur hat that I wear very proudly when our committee examines this issue. That hat is very useful when it rains.

Furthermore, research is currently being done on the heart valves of seals that could eventually help cure heart disease. A group of Greek doctors came to the Magdalen Islands and they successfully treated the valves in question in a clinical environment and used them on animals. Initial experiments have proven very successful and very positive. There is also the collagen factor.

Indeed, the seal hunt as an ancestral activity is not an activity like any other that can be easily replaced by something else. When Paul McCartney came to the Magdalen Islands, he said that if we gave these fishermen money, they would find something else to do.

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First of all, in order to properly understand, seal hunters are fishermen who do not do it simply for the money, but also because of tradition, and because these are the first signs of spring, the first signs of marine life. For them, it is extremely important. They even go hunting in extremely difficult and dangerous conditions. The hunt went well this year. It was relatively easy, because seals were found just off the coast of the Magdalen Islands. People could even travel on foot to do their hunting, but that is not the case every year.

• (1625)

Sometimes the conditions are extremely difficult and dangerous, as I said. Now we have this decision by the European Parliament based solely on demagoguery and misinformation. This decision hurts; it is disappointing and extremely frustrating. That is why we must challenge this decision as aggressively as possible here in the House of Commons and elsewhere.

• (1630)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): 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 Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer, Public Service of Canada; the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, the Economy.

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I must say that the issues affecting the Maritimes are much larger challenges, not the least of which is the destruction taking place within our seas of a wide range of fish and marine mammals. In fact, we know that the vast majority of marine mammals in the world are in danger of extinction. Most of the great whales are in danger of extinction and many of them live off the east coast of Canada. We have the northern right whales and the bowhead whales in the Arctic. We have a range of shark species that are on the brink of extinction. In fact, we have seen a massive decline in shark populations and large fish species in general.

With the destruction of our seas that is happening now, we are having dead seas. Huge sections in the oceans of the world are essentially dead, and it is getting larger. The seas are the key to life, not only in the oceans but also on land. As the species that live in the sea die, so will the species on land follow suit. This is something we need to understand very clearly. Many factors are affecting this, such as pollution and climate change, climate change being an enormous contributor to this.

Does my colleague not believe that his party should work with other parties, including the Liberal Party of Canada, in applying pressure on the government for an integrated response to tackle the death rate taking place in our oceans today, a response that includes Environment Canada, Foreign Affairs, International Development and Industry Canada, basically a whole of government approach?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and his comment.

I am under the impression that he just read one of the speeches that I made in committee or elsewhere on the Atlantic seal hunt.

Indeed, any action or strategy regarding this issue must be unanimous, vigorous, rigorous and widespread. We cannot face this challenge without looking at the whole picture.

We have to keep in mind the issue of climate change and the fact that we are wondering what is going to happen to our marine resources. Will they be affected by these changes? How? Are there species at risk because ocean currents are changing, and so on?

A biologist from Rimouski, Jean-Claude Brêthes, who is a former chairman or member of the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, once said that there are currently 6 million harp seals, which is the kind that is hunted. This is the only marine species that is not currently monitored. It eats whatever it wants, and it is not accountable to anyone. No one is watching what is going on right now. We do not know how much this species eats. It is an uncontrolled species that does what it wants to meet its needs. That is why we must try to control or stop all this, while respecting the Atlantic seal hunt, which is a traditional activity.

• (1635)

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we hear the solidarity of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans respecting oceans and sustainability and understanding that is the key to be able to create wealth and income in the future.

I want to piggyback on the question of my colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca. The government indicates that there are seven million harp seals and this population is growing. It appears that Canada is doing its part. We do not participate in a whaling program, such as whaling harvests, as do certain European countries or Japan. We certainly do not condone preying upon endangered species as the European community often does. We certainly do not condone or support harvesting 35,000 grey seals for the purpose of a cull.

We also do not condone sending rogue fleets from Europe over to Somalia to prey upon the lawlessness of irresponsible fishing by certain European fleets off the coast of Africa. It seems to be very significantly damaging not only to the fish stocks but to Europe's reputation to be a steward of the oceans.

Would the member be able to comment on that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Madam Speaker, no one can lecture anyone on how to fish, especially not the Europeans. There used to be a species that was very prevalent off the Magdalen Islands' coasts. That species was the walrus and it has disappeared because of the British, from England, who came and hunted it off the coast of the Magdalen Islands, to the point where it was exterminated very quickly.

So, we have to be very cautious with the ecosystem in which we live. Furthermore, the Atlantic seal hunt is conducted and controlled in a way that fully respects the principles of sustainable development.

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his speech.

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I listen to CBC radio fairly often. I am also appalled by the cuts that have been made to it. On the weekend, because there is so much driving to do, I heard a broadcast on which a European Union parliamentarian spoke out against the way information was given to all parliamentarians. As my colleague was just telling us, monumental sums of money have been spent on disinformation. She even talked about threats. She said that some parliamentarians who were planning to vote against that law, to vote against the ban on seal products, received threats. Her opinion was that the way the campaign was conducted was deplorable. As my colleague just said, there are elections coming up and so this was probably electioneering.

My colleague asked whether we ourselves should offer information and not disinformation. To do that, the government has to get involved. Does he really believe, given the negotiations it is starting with the European Union, which represents a market worth tens of billions of dollars, that the government will want to mount an honest and responsible defence of the seal hunt in Canada?

Mr. Raynald Blais: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for his question.

I would say that the answer is self-evident. One of the first things the Prime Minister said about the free trade agreement negotiations with the European Union was that there would be no...

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1640)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I would ask the hon. members at the back to go to the lobby if they want to continue their discussions.

The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My colleagues have fine voices, but they carry and it is difficult when I can hear them.

In fact, the problem is this. We have a Prime Minister who went to Europe. While he was there, he said there was no problem, and we would not cause problems about the seal hunt, because in any event it did not account for a large share of Canada's gross domestic product and we would let them negotiate with us. I have only one question on that point. How is it that we are regarded as barbaric by the Europeans when it comes to the seal hunt, but not too barbaric to sign a free trade agreement?

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to join in the concurrence debate on the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. I will be sharing my time with the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, who is a member of the committee and took part in the unanimous report that is before us.

The committee considered the matter of the seal harvest. I want to talk about some of the elements of the report and the very brief statement approving that the methods of harvesting are fully acceptable, that the harp seal hunt is humane, responsible and sustainable, which are the three elements that people in the European Union have attacked in trying to justify the ban of the seal harvest.

The member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, the member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte and the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor talked about the history of the seal harvest in Canada. It goes back many hundreds of years. Seals have been harvested for food, fuel, shelter, fur and other products for hundreds of years. Seal products consist of leather, oil, handicrafts, meat for human and animal consumption, as well as seal oil capsules rich in omega 3 fatty acids and other nutraceuticals. It is a product that has been used for many years and for many reasons and has a legitimate place in the market.

If we think of the island of Newfoundland as a triangle with St. Anthony at the top, Port aux Basques in one corner and St. John's in another, some people do not know that the whole northeast coast, the area from St. Anthony to St. John's, was only able to become settled year round by virtue of the fact that there was a seal harvest. That enabled people to live through the winter. Until the seal harvest there was a migratory fishery. The only people who stayed were the ones who escaped their masters and managed to find a way to survive. The viability of that coast came about as a result of the seal harvest, which was a fairly precarious and dangerous livelihood but one people engaged in.

Throughout most of Newfoundland's history, the seal fishery, as it was known, was the only source of cash for people who lived and survived on what was known as the truck system. They lived off their obligations to the merchant who supposedly looked after them, bought all of their product but only charged them a fee for what they consumed. They never had any cash. The seal fishery was the cash component of their income. Today it still accounts for between 25% and 35% of those engaged in the seal harvest.

I want to go back to another fisheries report. It has been studied by Parliament on a number of occasions. One of the most recent and comprehensive reports done by the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans was done two years ago and it was issued in April 2007.

My colleague, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, was a member of that committee. As well, the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor and the member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte participated in that report. It was a very comprehensive report. It focused on the sustainability, the humanness, the economic, social and cultural importance and the role of the seal harvest in achieving and maintaining an ecological balance within the marine ecosystem. It was a very serious report on the study of these aspects. It concluded the following on sustainability, and this is a quote from the European Commission:

It agrees with the European Commission that: "The seal populations in question are currently not endangered and are therefore not regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)." In addition, experts told the Committee that the Northwest Atlantic population of harp seal was probably one of the best managed wildlife species in the world.

• (1645)

We have heard other colleagues say that the population has grown from about two million animals in the early 1970s to nearly six million, and some say seven million, today. That is an indication that the issue of sustainability is not in question and that it is being properly managed by DFO.

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On the issue of humaneness, again, upon reviewing the evidence presented by expert independent veterinarians, the committee believes that the harp seal harvest is humane. The methods used to kill the seals, the hakapik and rifle, satisfy standards for humane killing and euthanasia, and compare favourably to methods used in slaughterhouses across the country. That would be true of Europe as well. If the issue were about humaneness or cruelty, people would not be dealing with the seal harvest, but they might be dealing with issues having to do with pâté de foie made in France and other countries, and the treatment in the production of veal.

Humaneness is not the issue here. Most of the seals are actually harvested with the use of the rifle on the front, which is the area off the northeast coast of Newfoundland. The estimates go from 75% to 90%. In the gulf and the Îles-de-la-Madeleine, the hakapik is the more traditional harvesting tool.

On the issue of the economic, social and cultural importance of the seal harvest, the committee concluded that the seal harvest was an important part of the economic, cultural and social fabric of Canada's east coast and the north, where thousands rely on this activity as an important source of income. We are dealing with something that has a value economically, socially and culturally.

There is another point which is not often talked about, although we heard some colleagues talk about it today. The member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine spoke about the importance of the seal harvest to the ecological balance within the marine ecosystem. Here the committee said that it believed that the seal harvest has a crucial role in achieving and maintaining an ecological balance with other marine species, including those valued by humans.

Many people who talk about ecology talk about the relationship between animals and the environment, but they leave out one of the animals that is pretty important to all of this, and that is humans who are also part of the marine and other ecosystems. Humans and animals interact in this environment. The role of the seal harvest is part of that ecological balance. If we took the seal harvest out of this equation, we would see an ecological imbalance that would lead to an increase in seal numbers, perhaps an increase in predation upon the food supply, such as the cod fish and other marine species, to the point of collapse of them as an economic harvest and also to the point of collapse of the food supply, a collapse of the seal population itself or the necessity for a cull. The balance is achieved in part by the role of the seal harvest.

After considering the four principles of sustainability and conservation of marine resources, all political parties represented on the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans remain united in their support for the commercial seal harvest, and then recommendations followed.

It is important to understand that today's motion concerns a report which is the product of many years of study by committees of the House. They are responsible, objective and understanding. They listen to experts. They try to be independent. They recognize the historical, cultural, social and economic value of the harvest. It has been determined on each and every occasion that this is a sustainable, viable, humane hunt. It is not that they did not recommend changes. The regulations have been changed and

improved over the years. Yet we are still faced with the ban by the European Union.

We have heard about the role of the ban and the images that have been generated in order to encourage public opinion to impose the ban. The image we have seen for 25 or 30 years is the white coat seal, normally with a tear running down from its eye, which is supposed to indicate the sorrow of the animal. I understand that it does not indicate that at all, but rather is a natural tearing. Nevertheless, that image is used to raise money to support the advertising. It is a vicious circle of using money to raise money to get more images to provide political support.

• (1650)

I agree with the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine. There are many people on the other side of the issue who have a very responsible, philosophical position for which I have great respect. A person who chooses not to eat meat, not to wear animal products such as leather belts or shoes and decides he or she wants to live without relying on animals, I have a great deal of respect for that opinion. A person who is a vegetarian by philosophy or belief has every right to do that and I have great respect for people who choose that way of life. However, there is a bit of a difference, and I am not saying this is what everybody is into, between being a vegetarian and insisting that no one else be allowed to eat meat. That is what we are dealing with here, a very great difference of opinion.

I see that my time is up and I hope I can elaborate on one or two of these points—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to further the comments of my colleague.

It is very interesting that the issues affecting the oceans of the world really receive short shrift. The international conservation caucus fielded a meeting with Alana Mitchell. She is a former *Globe and Mail* reporter and was also named the top international reporter on the environment. She wrote a book called *Sea Sick* and in it she quite clearly articulates the damage taking place to our oceans today. Dr. Sylvia Earle, the world bathyscaphe specialist, shark expert and oceanographer, has written amply about the dying oceans.

I want to ask my hon. colleague a question. He understands, as my Liberal colleague mentioned before, that the oceans are dying and we have a number of challenges, not the least of which is overfishing and the use of draggers. Unrestricted fishing in the open oceans beyond the 200-mile zone is a serious problem.

Would my hon. colleague not support that the Government of Canada should work with the member states that are signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, that we should work together to strengthen international regulations that are backed by judicial and enforcement measures, enforcement measures being particularly important, to deal in a punitive fashion with the overfishing that is destroying the oceans, not the least of which is being done by irresponsible European countries that are raping the earth's oceans?

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Does he not think we should take the lead on tightening the reins on these people and groups?

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, obviously Canada has been trying to take the lead. In fact, the fisheries committee has been urging Canada to take the lead with respect to the nose and tail of the Grand Banks in ensuring that the fish stocks are not destroyed.

The *Globe and Mail*, on Tuesday, May 5, contains a nice story, which I find disturbing. The headline is “Whales make comeback, other marine life in peril”. As we know, whales were hunted almost to extinction in the latter part of the last century and the early part of this century due to over-hunting.

This is obviously not happening to the seals, but one of the species that is at risk is called American plaice, found off the east coast of Newfoundland. It is being overfished by, guess who, the same people who are banning the import of seal products into Europe and at the same time engaging in overfishing practices. We have a great deal of difficulty controlling them.

Canada should be playing a role with international organizations to try to bring this under control. We have been having great difficulty with NAFO, as anybody who has been following that knows. We have to take a stronger role in terms of control off our own shores but also insist that other nations be more diligent as well, and stop the illegal and obviously unsustainable practices.

• (1655)

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the World Wildlife Fund released a report about a week ago indicating that bycatch fisheries on the nose and tail of the Grand Banks were at an unregulated and disproportionate level compared to actual targeted species. In fact, it said that the European Union was the biggest culprit in this regard. Bycatch fisheries are destroying stocks as an overt way to actually target certain species, which is actually a directed fishery. Could the member comment on whether the European Union activity is in keeping with sustainable fish harvesting practices?

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, clearly not and that underscores the difficulty that most of us in Canada have, particularly those who are engaged in this seal harvest.

Here is a community which is saying that on the one hand, morally it does not think the animals should be harvested, even though it is sustainable, and at the same time, the EU is not condemning the practices of its own member countries in the same oceans and ecosystem.

I think that is wrong and why we need to condemn that ban. It is not consistent with the high moral tone that the EU purports to have, which is totally absent when it comes to its fishing practices which have not only destroyed our coasts, but as the member for Esquimaux—Juan de Fuca said, other coasts throughout the world.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Madam Speaker, in my previous speech during the take note debate, I mentioned a bumper sticker I once saw in Nunavut that said, “Eat seals, 1,000 polar bears can't be wrong”. That is absolutely correct.

I was in Washington, D.C. a few weeks ago. A store called LUSH had posted a big advertisement that said, “Stop Canada's commercial seal hunt”. It had a picture of a whitecoat. This was just a little while

ago. I went into the store and asked the manager if she knew anything about the seal hunt. She said no. The poster came from somebody in Canada and she was asked to hand out postcards to people so that they could send them off to the Prime Minister to stop the seal hunt. She knew nothing about the seal hunt. It was just that somebody presented a good story without any facts.

This is the problem with the commercial seal harvest. A lot of these environmental groups, what we call “greenies”, on the extreme side are not allowing facts to get in the way of a good story. A good story is that Canadians are barbarians, destroying and knocking the heads and skulls of these cute little critters and wiping them off the face of the earth just so we can make money. This is how they portray it, and that the seals have no chance at all.

I have been here since 1997, through five Parliaments, two different governments, six different ministers, six different parliamentary secretaries and many different critics and roles of people in and out of committees. Every single time, the committee has agreed. It did not matter which Parliament or which government. It was agreed unanimously by those committees that the commercial seal harvest was the proper thing to do to provide livelihood for people on the east coast as well as our first nations and Inuit people in the far North.

It completely upsets me when we have people who are very good at exploiting what we call an open abattoir. It is very difficult to combat those photos of white ice, blue sky and red blood. There is just no way around that. Yet, these same people should take the time to go into a normal abattoir where chickens, pigs, cows or anything else are slaughtered. They would have a different view.

In our society, we are omnivores. We eat meat and plants. Some people prefer to be vegetarians for either health reasons or personal reasons. God love them for it, but they should not get in the way of people who prefer to have seal or to utilize the entire seal for its coat or medicinal purposes. As my colleague from St. John's East said, hunting of seals has been going on for centuries.

What will happen if this ban is successful? If these animal rights groups are successful, the seal population will increase further in size to a tipping point where it will either have a natural, massive die-off or we will have to cull them in the millions. A cull means that we would go out, kill them and let them sink to the bottom to become crab or lobster bait. I simply would not support something of that nature. I do not think anyone in the House would.

That is why we have to utilize the complete seal when we can. That is why the government authorizes a certain percentage of over 250,000 to 270,000 seals per year. Out of 7 million, that is not very much at all. However, it provides an important livelihood and an economic base for thousands of people in Newfoundland, the Gaspé, Nunavut and other parts of Atlantic Canada.

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It is unbelievable that the EU, with some of the worst fishing practices on the planet, can tell Canada what to do when it comes to the commercial seal harvest. What right do the EU countries have to say to people in Newfoundland and Labrador that they do not have a right to earn a living? What right do they have to say that our traditional peoples, the Inuit and first nations, do not have a right to sustain themselves by hunting seals? What right do they have to tell Canada about fishing practices when they themselves, in many cases, are the scoundrels of the sea?

• (1700)

If this complete ban on seal products follows through, then what are the animal rights groups going to go after next? I can assure members that putting a live lobster into boiling seawater cannot be very pleasant for the lobster. I can assure members that de-beaking a chicken cannot be very pleasant for the chicken. I guarantee members that castration of a bull cannot be very pleasing for the bull. I can tell members that branding of cattle cannot be very pleasant for the cattle.

Where does it stop? Which animal or which species is next on the list? It will be at a point where we will be unable to consume anything of that nature. For hunters who wish to go out and hunt deer, it cannot be very pleasant for deer to get shot. It cannot be very pleasant for bear, or caribou, or sheep, or whatever. Which species will be next on their hit list?

This is why the halting of the ban on the seal harvest is so critical to the traditional ways of life of our hunters, anglers and our first nations people. If we do not stop this now, they will go after another species. It will be to the point where we are left eating lima beans and tofu. I do not have any problem with lima beans and tofu except that it gives me gas. However, the problem is this. I like variety in my diet, so do many other Canadians and so does the rest of the world.

To say that the seals are endangered is simply false. To say that we are hunting white coats is an outright lie. To say that the hunt is inhumane is wrong. For the EU to take this stand is simply wrong. We know it is doing it for crass politics and not based on a scientific decision.

When the member for Malpeque and I spoke to some Dutch folks in P.E.I. a few years ago, they said very clearly that this was not based on any scientific numbers of the humaneness of the hunt. They said that this was strictly politics, that it was about getting re-elected, that it was about listening to thousands of people who signed a petition, but gave it no extra thought after that.

When people talk about banning the seal harvest, if we speak to most of these people who sign these petitions and ask them if they have really thought about what they have done, most of them say that they do not know many people who hunt seals, or they do not know many people who make a livelihood from the seals, but they are awfully cute on the camera, and that is why they sign the petitions.

My colleagues in Newfoundland and Labrador, especially, and those in Nunavut and the Gaspé, are having to go through this and having to defend this traditional practice over and over again. I really feel sorry for them. The people in Newfoundland and Labrador have

a lot better things to do than worry about what the EU says about their practices when it comes to the seal harvest. I wish the EU would leave the good people of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nunavut alone and allow them to traditionally harvest their products in a sustainable manner, in a manner that provides them an economic livelihood so they have the dignity of work, the dignity of feeding their families, the dignity of knowing when they get up in the morning and they go to bed at night that they have done something that their forefathers and grandfathers have done.

I warn the House and I warn Parliament, what is next on the chopping block? A lot of members of Parliament are from rural areas in Ontario, in the west and in the north. What is next? If the House does not stand united in support of those people in the commercial seal harvest, then what else will people do?

I plead with members of all parties to look at this resolution for what it is. This is a sustainable harvest. If the government does it right and provides the market scenarios for them, if it ensures it is well checked, well in balance, we can ensure the livelihood for future generations to come. However, more important, if we do not do this and we allow this ban to occur, it will have reverberations throughout not only Atlantic Canada, but throughout the entire country.

• (1705)

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague covered the issues very well. My colleague will know that, as far as we can tell, built into the text of the proceedings in the European Parliament is an exemption for the Inuit. In spite of that exemption, Mary Simon, one of the Inuit leaders, said less than a week ago, in referring to this European action, “This will cause more despair among our Inuit youth”. In spite of the exemption, she is very pessimistic about what this will do for the Inuit people.

Would my colleague comment on that?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary brings up a very good point. Who in the world can tell the difference? When somebody walks down the Champs Élysées or the streets of Berlin with a seal vest on, how does someone know whether that seal was caught by an aboriginal or non-aboriginal person?

I lived in Yukon in the early eighties, when the animal rights groups went after the fur trappers. It had a devastating effect on first nations people in Yukon. Mary Simon is absolutely correct. People of Nunavut are trying to teach their children traditional ways, the ways of their grandfathers and grandmothers. What Europe is saying to them is that their traditional ways are wrong and they should not do that.

That is simply wrong. This ban will have a devastating effect on the territory of Nunavut. I hope all of us would look at that territory and understand its traditional cultures.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am of the belief that using nude photos of women, who were paid to do so, for the exploitation of a commercial campaign is to treat women as objects. It is a form of violence against women, yet that is exactly what we have found with, for example, LUSH Cosmetics.

The hon. member mentioned the campaign used by LUSH Cosmetics. A paid staff member of the company was asked to paint herself in red paint and lie nude on a Canadian flag. LUSH Cosmetics entered into a very large scale commercial campaign to sell a particular brand of soap at that point in time.

It is my opinion that using paid, nude female models to do this is exploitation. It is treating them as objects and treating women as objects is a form of violence.

Would the hon. member agree with my assessment?

● (1710)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, he is absolutely correct. Those people will lie, distort, do whatever it takes to stop the seal harvest. Going to extremes of this nature, to have a naked woman painted in red lie on the Canadian flag, is just one example of what they would do.

If LUSH Cosmetics or anyone else does not like the seal harvest, then they should not buy seal products, but they should not get in the way of those people who earn a livelihood from an honest living.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have had many years of Canadians not fighting back on this issue, and we have seen the hypocrisy of the European Union in its arguments. Last week a Liberal member pointed out the hypocrisy of the wild boar hunt in Germany and other examples of that.

Does the seal industry in Canada have any plan to deal with this issue through advertising programs, through websites and so on, in an effort to fight back?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, I will give the government credit. The government has gone with industry and Nunavut individuals to Europe on repeated occasions. This is the number one issue of the ambassador for Fisheries Conservation, Loyola Sullivan. The Minister of Fisheries has said that this is her number one priority.

Everyone has tried, within the realms of democracy and politics, to get the message out, that what we are doing is correct. The difficulty is when others, such as Europe, never allow facts to get in the way of a good story.

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are here today for obvious reasons that relate to the recent vote in the European parliament, which, if effected, would place a devastating blow and some would even suggest an end to the seal hunt in Canada.

We recognize this has been a long-standing concern and an issue of much debate for many people in Europe. I do not know that it will change a lot over time, but we need to look at what happened this time. Then we need to ask if there is a remedy to this situation. We believe there is a remedy.

Many of us want to speak to this matter today. I will be sharing my time, Mr. Speaker, with the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

As we know, a vote took place in the European parliament. That vote effectively banned the sale of seal products in the EU. That decision will be given full consideration by the EU Commission before the end of June and it will decide whether to uphold that vote.

Routine Proceedings

We have asked for something reasonable, something that can be scientifically backed up and endorsed. We have been very aggressive on this file with members of the EU parliament at every diplomatic and political level. We appointed an ambassador just for this task, who has had over 350 meetings with various EU members to try to impress upon them their responsibility to follow the rules and do what we have asked.

The procedures that are followed in the Canadian seal harvest are ones that are acknowledged, substantiated and endorsed by outside organizations that have the expertise to give this full consideration. I would like to refer to a couple of these.

The European Food Safety Authority looked at the various processes that are used in this harvest and it tabled a report in December 2008, concluding, “it is possible to kill seals rapidly and effectively without causing them avoidable pain or distress”. In fact, the method that is used for the main hunt, predominantly being the rifle, is virtually instantaneous.

A second study was undertaken for the European Commission to assess the impact of this proposed regulation, and it noted, “The negative consequences of trade restrictions would fall disproportionately on Canada”. The commission's proposal contained what is known as a derogation clause, or it could be called an exception clause, which would allow for the trade in “humanely hunted seal products”.

Those who voted against the seal hunt may have been well-intended. They were absolutely misinformed. I believe some of them thought they were doing the right thing by including a clause recognizing the historical and cultural aspect of indigenous hunters, be they in Canada, or Greenland or some other area where a seal harvest takes place. Inuit hunters themselves have said that if this ban goes into place, it would effectively end their market. Therefore, a clause that would only include the ability of Europeans to continue to buy that narrow portion of the product simply would not be sustainable economically.

● (1715)

That leads us to the other aspect of the Canadian harvest, which is that it is done in a way that is environmentally sustainable. The overall herd on the Canadian side, depending on whose report we look at, numbers something in the order of six million. The intended amount of harvest for this year was something in the order of 250,000, and as we know now, it is going to be a lot less than that.

This is not a species at risk. This is a species that is proliferating and one that can sustain a hunt that is just that: It is sustainable.

What we have asked for is the derogation clause or the exception clause to include the indigenous factor, but as our own Inuit people tell us, that is not enough. It has to include the notion of a hunt being accepted that is humane, and I just quoted the report that talks about the method used, that is done in a way that is rapid and effective and does not cause pain or distress, and is sustainable from an environmental point of view.

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We have said, put those provisions into the derogation clause and we can live with that. It also would underline and would enable those in the EU parliament who voted against this to say, as we would want to say, that no hunt or no harvesting of any animal should be done in a way that is cruel. We all agree with that. This would satisfy their legitimate concern, if that is their legitimate concern.

We have already heard from members of all parties talking about how, really, the international media has been played on this. Just last week when I was watching television, there were my words in the background saying, according to this report, this is a harvest that is done with humane, accepted international standards, but the whole time I am talking, there is a picture of a baby seal, a cute little pup of a baby seal.

Baby seals, those pups, are not hunted in the Canadian harvest. If there are other jurisdictions that are doing that, then maybe there should be something that applies to them.

Have you ever seen a baby calf, Mr. Speaker? I think you have. Have you ever seen a baby sheep? I think you have.

These things can be used in a way that sends out an entirely wrong message and a message that moves people emotionally to do something that is not necessary but the result of which would destroy the livelihoods of thousands of people.

More than a few of the EU members did support us. Obviously, the majority did not. We are asking them to consider what they have done, to realize that they are going against one of their own reports that says this harvest is done in a way that is humane and sustainable. They are going against that. They are making a decision based on emotion, not on fact and reality, and in the process of doing that, they are destroying the livelihood of thousands of people who are directly involved.

We hear about the number of people who are directly involved, but there is all the indirect provision that goes on—the processing and manufacturing, the processing of food and everything that proceeds from that. This has a very major impact.

That is why this has brought parliamentarians together from across the aisle today, to say that if a trading nation or a trading organization wants to ban a product, they have to do that on a scientific basis. In this case, they have to do it in a way that acknowledges that we need an exception clause for those areas where the harvest is done in a manner that is humane and sustainable and also recognizes the indigenous component. However, it goes far beyond the indigenous component.

I thank members on all sides of the House for working together on this very important topic today.

• (1720)

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for providing some comfort, some reinforcement to what we have known for generations to be a fully sustainable, humane practice that has been conducted in compliance with World Trade Organization rules and requirements.

I will ask the minister the following question, and it is a very direct one. It has been suggested that to raise the issue of the seal hunt and what we consider to be an illegal trade ban by the European

Union in the context of the current Canada-European Union free trade talks would be to poison the well and would not be helpful to our cause. As has been suggested by a very renowned and thoughtful commentator, why did the European Union do it, then? They are the ones engaged in this illegal trade action at the dawn of a new era in Canada-EU trade, yet they are the ones who decided to invoke an illegal trade ban at this particular point in time.

How can we as Canadians have confidence that these talks are occurring in a good faith environment when it is the European Union that has decided to poison the well? They chose to poison the well and embark upon an illegal trade activity at the very moment we were asking for more rules-based trade.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, the point is well taken. Let me put some framework around my response.

It was very exciting to be in Prague last week with the Prime Minister as we formally signed a declaration that gives our negotiators in Canada and in the EU the ability to start the negotiations on a free trade agreement.

For Canada, the benefits of that would be huge. We have run some econometric numbers on it, and if there were a free trade agreement in place right now between us and the 27 countries of the EU, our exports would be \$12 billion more than if we did not have one or do not get one.

I want members to consider the impact of an extra \$12 billion of exports right now in this time of economic downturn. It is huge and it is very positive. It would create jobs and opportunities.

With all trade arrangements, there are always, without exception, going to be disputes about a particular trade item. What we have then is a mechanism to handle the dispute in such a way that the whole agreement is not cratered.

We always have one dispute or another, even before tribunals, with the Americans, for instance, or possibly with the Mexicans in our free trade agreement. We do not trash the whole agreement and affect the livelihoods of thousands, and in fact, with NAFTA, millions of people.

With the EU, it is going to affect millions of people. We do not trash a whole broader agreement because of one dispute, however passionately we feel about that dispute. So we can do the two separately.

By the way, the Prime Minister did raise this particular issue with the members of the commission with whom we met last week, and he raised it in a very strong way, but we are also going to continue negotiations to get a broader economic agreement under that umbrella.

• (1725)

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, everyone can see that we are unanimous in defending the seal hunt, and I imagine that the Minister of International Trade can see it, too. It has to be said that such unanimity is somewhat rare. It is a rare occasion when we can agree, beyond partisanship or our differing political opinions. In this case, we agree on the seal hunt. But this is more than a hunt, it is also a tradition.

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As I mentioned in my speech—and I would like to hear the minister's opinion on this—it is frustrating to hear this, and our impression is that we are becoming the sacrificial lambs.

This is a small thing as compared to the big Europe-Canada treaty, it is \$12 million as compared to \$12 billion. But that is not how we should be looking at it. It is also a failure to respect a tradition, and I would like to hear the minister on that point.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, it is encouraging to have a consensus from time to time. I realize it seldom occurs.

There is a consensus because the members agree. We want free trade that is fair. If there is a way to reach an agreement with the European Union, as proposed by this motion, there must be a system that will ensure that we are given consideration. I agree with that.

Europeans do not understand that it is important for us and not just in terms of culture. It is vital to the life and the economy of thousands of people here. We agree and we will continue to fight for that.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to participate in this important debate brought on by the May 5 vote by the European parliament to ban trade in seal products.

I would like to address some of the important issues underlying this debate, particularly those relating to wild animal hunts and the actions of animal rights activists.

We must be absolutely clear as to what is at stake.

Our animal rights opponents have a very clear agenda that will not stop with the seal hunt. They will target other wild animal hunts as well, and certainly fur trapping will again come up for scrutiny. Other sectors in Canada are also vulnerable as well to emotional, non-factual arguments of the type that have proven influential with European legislators. Attacks have been launched against Canadian forestry practices, and again we see that rural Canadians living closest to nature are the most vulnerable.

I am grateful, therefore, that this debate on the Canadian seal hunt has demonstrated the extent to which the primary products sector is so important in many regions of Canada. Most people in Europe and many in urban Canada do not realize that many small communities continue to depend for their survival on the land and the sea, much as they always have.

We owe a great debt to the Inuit and other Canadians in Nunavut and Atlantic Canada who proudly continue with their way of life despite the insults and lies. I am encouraged, in particular, that objective conservation organizations, which have taken the time to look carefully into this issue, are highly supportive of sealing.

A good example is the IWMC World Conservation Trust, headed by Eugene Lapointe, who previously served as secretary general of the Convention on International Trade and Endangered Species. He made the following point, "The natural beauty in remote northern regions continues to exist because people maintain traditional ways of life. Central to this, is utilizing local natural resources, including seals".

In a world where many regions, clearly, are living beyond their means, it is clear as well that rural, isolated communities with a strong sense of their place in the natural world must continue to exist.

Sealing is not a sunset industry with no relevance to the needs of today. Quite to the contrary. In addition to the pelts, which have been the main commodity, the oil and meat are increasingly valuable. Hunters have demonstrated great ingenuity in developing new uses, including the development of seal oils as a valuable diet supplement, and initial research on the medical use of seal heart valves is most encouraging.

However, it is also recognized that the challenges faced by our sealers in isolated northern and coastal communities are made much greater by actions, such as the May 5 vote in the European parliament. I am grateful that some European members of parliament took a courageous and principled stand in opposing the May 5 vote to ban trade in seal products. The French European MEP, Véronique Mathieu, was one of them. In her May 5 speech, she expressed profound disappointment and concern for the impact of the vote on Canada-EU relations.

In her speech, Madam Mathieu accused supporters of the ban of waging their campaign for re-election in the June 7 EU parliamentary elections on the backs of Canadian sealers, further noting that there was nothing to be proud of, especially considering the impact this ban has on the Inuit people and their economic livelihood. Madam Mathieu eloquently described the impact of the EU measure on our Inuit. For aboriginal communities, sealing is an important cultural tradition as well as a significant source of income. It has also been an important part of the Inuit way of life for thousands of years.

While the measure adopted by the European parliament today includes a limited exemption for some traditional Inuit and indigenous products, this will serve no useful purpose. Inuit spokespersons in both Canada and Greenland have consistently pointed out that such an exemption is meaningless if the overall market for seal products is destroyed by a ban.

European supporters of the European parliament's ban have been fooled by the animal rights activists. I would urge that they now take note of the boastful claims that their actions have already devastated the market, with the average price for a seal pelt below \$15.

● (1730)

The Canadian government must remain vigilant against new anti-seal hunt initiatives. An article on the website of HSUS, a prominent anti-seal hunt NGO, states that it will now take steps to ramp up its campaign in Europe for a global boycott of Canadian seafood. It is very encouraging that the HSUS boycott initiative in the United States has been largely ineffective. HSUS claims notwithstanding, we cannot allow ourselves to become complacent.

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Similarly, PETA, or People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, launched a campaign asking VANOC and the Government of Canada to help end the Canadian seal slaughter. It has protested in downtown Vancouver and in some European capitals. PETA has the nerve to disrespect our Inuit people and all Canadians by distorting the inukshuk symbol for the 2010 Winter Games as part of its anti-seal hunt propaganda.

I urge all Canadians to stand firm against this type of blackmail and intimidation. The truth about the humane, sustainable Canadian seal hunt will prevail in the end. I know I can rely on the support of all members in the House as we move forward. I also wish to underscore my appreciation to Canadian sealers for the valuable lessons they and their communities are teaching the rest of us about living in harmony with the environment. I support the seal hunt.

• (1735)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a fairly simple series of questions. I have said before that the oceans are dying and that it is an issue that receives short shrift in the House.

As part of the international conservation caucus, we had a meeting today with the head of the IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature. It is an international organization that ties together 11,000 scientists in 160 countries. It is the longest, most integrated and expansive network of organizations dealing with conservation on land and at sea. We know now that most whales are in danger and that there has been a massive die-off and a reduction in all large fish species. In my province of British Columbia, we have a massive problem in terms of salmon species.

Would my colleague put pressure on the relevant Ministers of Fisheries and the Environment to work together to deal with some of the severe and significant environmental concerns that we have on the west coast that are causing the collapse of our fisheries, not only on the west coast but also on the east coast?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I stood today to talk in support of the seal hunt but I am actually from the interior of British Columbia where we certainly do not have oceans.

However, in response to my colleague's question, it becomes important as parliamentarians to look at all of Canada and do what is right.

I will go back to the seal hunt. I was at an event this weekend where we had students from across Canada preparing proposals on the significance of the seal hunt and what our culture and heritage mean in terms of moving forward as Canadians.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am particularly intrigued by the member as she and I come from the same province and, as she has just identified, there are no seals in her riding. What has caused her to enter into this debate and cover the issues in such grand style?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I am not close to the sea. I grew up in an urban centre and moved as a young adult to rural remote British Columbia. What is very obvious to me is that what is normal in an urban environment is not the way of life for our rural communities.

Let me take the fur trade. Next door to me lived an 85-year-old gentleman who still did his trap lines. We had hunters who protected their game. Rural communities have a way of life that urban people often do not understand.

In the same sense that I hope all members of Parliament will eventually look at the long gun registry in terms of their respect for all Canadians and that very important rural way of life, this was important to me in terms of something that was important for our friends from Newfoundland and Labrador and Nunavut.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would just say that the horse is out of the barn, although it is not a good analogy for seals. In Labrador we would probably say that the seals have taken to the water. When they take to the water, they are much more difficult to hunt and harvest.

The ban is there. What does the hon. member suggest we do now? What action should the government take now in terms of fighting this ban and helping our sealers?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, it is always very fortunate to be preceded by the minister. I thought he talked very eloquently and clearly in terms of our government's next step. I really appreciate his earlier comments regarding where our government is going.

• (1740)

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly honoured to stand this evening to speak to this very important issue.

I want to thank my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo for adding to the discussion and bringing a different perspective, from the interior of British Columbia, on behalf of the sealers of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Quebec and other sealers across the country. I thank her for her encouragement and support and for her continued deliberation on this very important issue.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Labrador.

Tonight I would like to talk a bit about the 250-year-long tradition of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians utilizing the seal hunt to sustain their families. Coming from a very cold and harsh winter, they take to the ice floes in the late winter and early spring, to sustain their families, to catch seals for money, food and clothing after a very tough winter. They use the money to sustain their families for food. They use the money to repair their boats and nets to get ready for the summer fishery.

Today I am standing to discuss the seal hunt that has been severely challenged by this ban on seal products by the European Union. We took part in a debate in this very chamber last week on the seal hunt. We talked about how misinformation has been brought to the European Union, brought to the world, if I may say so, on behalf of the anti-seal hunt protesters. It is misinformation on the humaneness and conservation issues around this very hunt.

I know a lot of sealers. I know a lot of families who have sealed. There are 6,000 sealers in Newfoundland and Labrador alone, who raise between 25% and 35% of their annual income from this very fishery.

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We have heard from the government. We know that there are approximately seven million seals around the shores of Newfoundland and Labrador. Certainly this is not a conservation issue. Certainly this is not a concern that there are too few seals. In fact, there are too many seals. We now know that about 700,000 tonnes of fish a year are consumed by these seals. An unbelievable amount of fish is being taken from the waters off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador by this overabundance of seals.

We know it is not a humane issue. We have heard from the World Wildlife Fund. We have heard from an international array of veterinarians that they are not concerned in any way, shape or form about the way the seal hunt is executed. They know it is done humanely. Therefore, those two issues can be put aside.

This is a humane hunt. There are no conservation concerns, so what is the concern here? It seems that there is a lot of marketing and a lot of hype. We have heard the minister talk about the pictures of the beautiful baby seals. Perhaps because we have a challenge with cod, we need to make cod prettier to ensure we get the attention that is needed to rebuild those stocks.

We have a serious problem of foreign overfishing off the nose and tail of the Grand Banks of Newfoundland and Labrador. Fish such as turbot and American plaice, which my hon. colleague mentioned earlier, are in serious jeopardy. Certainly the seals are in jeopardy, but there are a lot of fish stocks that are in serious trouble.

The seal hunt is valued at up to \$60 million annually. In 2006, about \$30 million was contributed to the income of the sealers. That is a tremendous amount of money.

We have talked again and again about the trade issues with Europe. We have to stress with our government, with the Minister of International Trade and with the Prime Minister how important it is that in talks on trade with the European Union they reiterate that the seal hunt is humane, that it is not an issue of conservation. Stocks are plentiful; they are almost overabundant.

It is a shame we keep talking about the fact that we may have to have a cull and the European Union is completely okay with having a cull of the seals.

● (1745)

We have heard that when the Newfoundland and Labrador sealers go to the hunt, they are utilizing the entire animal. They utilize the fur. The seal protein is exceptionally good. They utilize the oils of the seal for lifesaving nutraceutical products. Now we are even hearing that there are uses of the animal for other potential medical opportunities.

However, we have to move the debate. We have to start the action that is required. The Pateys, the Heddersons, the Doyles and the Murphys, who take to the ice pans in March of every year, are looking to this House today. They are looking at their parliamentarians and they are asking how we are going to help them and whether we are going to do anything in this regard. That is why I am pleading with the Prime Minister and with the minister to make sure that when they are talking trade with the European Union that this is first and foremost on their minds.

We also have to continue to pursue every avenue possible under the World Trade Organization. This is an illegal ban. This is counter to the World Trade Organization. We should continue to pursue that, and I look forward to our doing so.

The sealers of Newfoundland and Labrador, the sealers of Quebec and the sealers of the Magdalen Islands are watching this debate. They are listening, and they are asking for our support, our help.

We also have to aggressively deal with the misinformation and promote new potential markets for the seal hunt. The fur and the leather of the seal are of utmost quality. We should be promoting those products, and again, promoting nutraceuticals. Here is an opportunity for science and technology to utilize the products of the seal for the goodness of mankind.

We also need to support the sealers. This is their time of need. They need to sustain their income. They need to turn to government. There has to be some assistance for the sealers who have lost income.

They are getting ready to do different types of fishing around the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador. The crab fishery has already started. Some are about to go out for the shrimp, when the ice goes. But they have lost income. They have lost the income of the seal hunt. We have to assist them. We have to implore government to offer some assistance. While we are exploring new products, more opportunities and new markets, we have to assist the sealers.

We also have to make sure we are getting out there globally, that we are telling people that Canada has a very humane seal hunt, that we have an overabundance of seals and that there is no concern on the sustainability of the hunt.

I rise to say that the efforts of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans are very important, to thank the members for the opportunity to again rise in this House in support of the seal hunt and to implore government to continue the actions that are needed to make this hunt successful.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can see that my colleague opposite is well versed on this issue and that she feels strongly about it. She obviously knows sealing families; in fact, she might be related to some, but she certainly knows others.

Based on that personal experience, I wonder how she would respond to those who say, "the seal hunt is appalling and has become more trouble than it is worth". That is an actual quote from a Liberal strategist's blog. I am not meaning to be partisan here, because I think there are many Canadians who might be thinking in those terms.

Having known these sealers, how would the hon. member respond to that?

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the question, because there are detractors. There are people who are misinformed about the seal hunt. As many colleagues around this chamber have said, any time an animal is killed in an open abattoir, when there is blood on the ice, and when there are scenes shown on television of baby seals being killed, it is difficult for people to understand that it is done humanely.

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However, that is part of what we need to do in this country. We have to make sure people understand that it is a humane hunt.

Yes, I do know many, many sealers. I know many families of sealers. This is not done, in any way, in malice. This is done very humanely. They have a deep care and concern for the ecology of the oceans, for the safety of their families and for the animals as well.

I think it is important that this House, as well as all of us, as Canadians, tell people that the hunt is humane.

• (1750)

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first let me congratulate my colleague on an incredible presentation today in this House on behalf of those we know in Newfoundland and Labrador who seal as a way of making a living. She has made some very valid points.

I am so pleased she was able to make the presentation today. We are all feeling the pain of those who are trying to make a living from the sealing industry but find themselves in a very difficult situation as a result of the ban on seal products by the European Union.

I would like to ask her about one point she made. She made the valid point that while the Prime Minister is in negotiations with the EU with respect to trade between our countries it is important that the Prime Minister make the point that this is a wrong decision by the parliamentarians in the EU.

When the Prime Minister is on record as saying he will not contaminate the negotiations with the EU by bringing up the seal industry as a prerequisite for not moving forward, how should we deal with that? How do we get the Prime Minister to acknowledge that it should be something he raises as a very important point before proceeding with the trade negotiations with the EU?

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague raises an issue that is very well known. The Prime Minister has been in Prague, and he has had discussions on setting up the framework and parameters around the EU talks. We heard earlier from the Minister of International Trade that it has been raised with the EU.

I think we have to go further. How can we have an open discussion with the European Union on open and fair trade when they are moving counter to what the WTO has done? This is an illegal ban.

We have to implore the Prime Minister and the Minister of International Trade to intervene now to tell them it is not acceptable to move in this direction of protectionism for these animals without knowing the full impact they are having in the European Union.

We have to implore the Prime Minister to make this a most serious issue with regard to the talks with the European Union. I think it is incredibly essential that they make this their number one priority. I think it is essential for the sealers of Newfoundland and Labrador, indeed all hunters in this province, and all of us in this country, that he take this important step.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the words and the actions of my colleague, the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl and thank her as well for sharing her time on this very important issue.

I come from a little island community called Williams Harbour. It is a sealing community like so many along the coast of Labrador and around the coast of the island of Newfoundland, and on the north shore of Quebec.

I come from a sealing family who has participated in the hunt for generations like so many other families within our province. The hunt is a part of our livelihood, yes, and just as important, a part of our tradition. There is something about the seal hunt, like so many other practices or traditions in our country, that makes us what we are. It is a part of our identity and without it we do not feel the same. We do not feel as complete.

I can speak in that way as a Labradorian, as a person from the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I can speak in that respect as a northerner who lives in the northern part of our country. I can speak in that respect as an aboriginal person whose traditions go back hundreds and indeed thousands of years.

When it comes to the seal hunt itself, and we look at this particular ban, we can say categorically that the members of the European Union were duped, that they have bought into a lie, and that they have bought into a campaign of misinformation. That is a dangerous precedent if a sham can somehow become law, that affects our livelihoods and affects our way of life.

When we look at some of the particulars in the ban itself, like the exemption for Inuit, that is a farce. It was just a face-saving measure on the part of the European parliamentarians. They talk about it in the global context that somehow this comes out of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is a fallacy. That particular exemption has been condemned by Inuit leaders and aboriginal leaders throughout the country. It means absolutely nothing. This ban is still an attack on a way of life, on our traditions, our practices and our culture.

The ban also talks about allowing certain countries to carry out a cull on the basis of ecological integrity or trying to maintain some balance in the ecosystem.

I do not know of another country that has a seal population of approximately seven million animals. I will repeat what was said before by a former premier of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. He said, "They're in the water. They're not eating turnips. They are eating fish. They're eating caplin. They're eating cod. They're eating salmon. All of these species, the salmon, the caplin and the cod face challenges in terms of sustainability".

So, it is ironic and hypocritical that we have the European Union countries saying we can cull the animals for ecological integrity in certain countries, but we cannot have a sustainable, humane hunt that also carries, as a part of its integrity, the ecology, the balance that we require in our own ecological systems. They are hypocritical in terms of what they have put in this particular ban and they are also playing into a false argument and using an exemption that means nothing when it comes to the Inuit.

Routine Proceedings

I will use myself as an example. I am a quarter blood Inuk, but I would not necessarily be able to participate in the hunt under this particular ban even though I have participated in the seal hunt the last two to three years and I hold a commercial sealing licence. We also harvest seals for food and for crafts or household use. We have that balance within our own culture already.

• (1755)

I appreciate the fact that all parties in this chamber are on the same page, that we are all trying to work through this issue. I appreciate the fact that there is some unanimity among all colleagues in the House, but we have to ask some questions.

We have to ask questions about the government's strategy, or if it even has a strategy to protect the seal hunt. We have to ask what type of tactics were used in terms of the Conservative government's approach. We have to ask what type of action was taken, or was there a lack of action. I ask these questions in all seriousness.

Was the Conservative government's approach co-ordinated? Did it involve the provinces and the territories in a meaningful way? Did the government involve aboriginal groups? Did it involve organizations like the Canadian Sealers Association or the Fur Institute of Canada? How co-ordinated was the response? What elements made up the so-called campaign? Was there publicity?

I have not seen any pro-sealing ads from our government to be quite honest. Maybe the parliamentary secretary could produce one for me. I have not seen an information campaign from the government educating the public within the European Union as well as parliamentarians over there because a lot of what is happening is a result of public pressure on those parliamentarians.

How aggressive were the diplomatic efforts? I am not questioning the personal integrity of Ambassador Sullivan, but how effective was he? How much support did he have in terms of doing his particular work? If there was a co-ordinated, technically driven campaign, how much money was actually expended?

These are legitimate questions to lay on the floor of this chamber. We deserve some answers, sealers deserve some answers, and those in our communities deserve some answers to these particular questions.

It is also incumbent upon the government to review its strategy, if it had a strategy, to see where it failed. Where were the weaknesses? Where were some of the potential strengths? These are all crucial questions.

Our sealers are in need. Our sealers are hurting and their families are hurting. Our communities need help.

The Minister of International Trade said that sealing was crucial to the livelihood of sealers and their families. What are we going to do now since the seals have taken to the water? Are we going to provide income support? Are we going to extend EI benefits? Are we going to launch a campaign? Are we going to have a WTO challenge? What are we going to do now?

We are talking in the House, but people want answers. They want to know what went wrong. They want to know what is going to happen to help them now. I ask these questions with a sense of

sincerity and with a sense of integrity because I am thinking about the people back home. I am thinking about the many families who are hurting.

I get calls every single day, as do other members from my province, from people asking what we are going to do for them now. They want to know how we are going to help them out now. They need help. There has been a promise of some help, and rightly so, for lobster fishermen because they are going through a difficult time. Our sealers are no less important, our fishermen are no less important, in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, in Quebec, or in the north.

Where is the help for our sealers and for our fishermen when they need it most?

• (1800)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the last two speakers really hit the nail on the head. Over the last couple of debates we have dealt with the issues involved here, but only the last two speakers have really dealt with solutions.

Is the solution to conduct an advertising campaign? Where have we been all these years? We should be looking at the possibilities more aggressively. What are we doing in terms of a plan of action involving an all-party committee? This sounds reasonable as well. We all seem to be in agreement here in the House and we are all making speeches, but beyond that who really hears us at this point.

We should probably have an all-party committee that could aggressively put out the arguments to dispel the myths that are being propagated over there in Europe. It is absolutely unbelievable that we are just going to sit back and let the EU get away with what it is doing. I applaud the last two speakers. I would like to hear some further comments from the member.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the sentiments and words of my colleague. Indeed, yes, sometimes we all take a lot of comfort in speaking with and listening to each other, and hopefully carrying a message of hope and optimism back to our communities, provinces and the families who are most affected.

The questions I asked were: What was the strategy? How was it laid out? Were there pro-sealing ads? How much money was expended? The government has a responsibility to lay out exactly what it undertook in this particular regard.

One of the greater responsibilities now is how do we respond? How do we respond in a way that overturns this ban? Do we undertake a marketing campaign? I asked the minister, do we undertake a WTO challenge? I did not get a direct answer on that particular question. What do we do now to help the families that are hurting? They need immediate action on the part of the government.

• (1805)

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the ways we could indeed help sealers from the northeast coast of Newfoundland, the Northern Peninsula and the coast of Labrador, is for the government to actually do what it committed to do in the House, which is to provide some income support for fishermen who could not earn an income this past year because of very difficult ice conditions.

Routine Proceedings

Would it be of any assistance to those fishermen, who happen to be the seal fishers of this country from Newfoundland and Labrador, if the government made good on its promise and provided the ice compensation that it committed to?

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, the issue of ice compensation and providing some income relief for sealers affected by ice conditions, low markets and low seal pelt prices was committed to in the House by a couple of ministers, but we have yet to see anything delivered in terms of assistance or aid for our sealers.

I am sure there are many colleagues who can attest to the fact that there are many families that make between \$15,000 and \$25,000 in net family income. Providing the seal fishermen with \$3,000 or \$4,000 might not sound like a lot of money to many Canadians but that is 15%, sometimes 20%, of a sealer's income. It is essential that they have that income. It is not there this spring and we are asking the government to help the sealers.

If the government is going to talk about supporting the sealers and doing all these things, it should put it into action. It is no good to talk about it if it is not put into action. I say to the government to put it into action and do not just talk about it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

LIBRARY MATERIALS

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present seven petitions from seven different provinces in support of the library 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.

[Translation]

MAGDALEN ISLANDS

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure and the tremendous honour of presenting a petition signed by almost 2,000 people with respect to an event that occurred in 1970. At that time, the *Irving Whale* sunk near the Magdalen Islands. Oil was released by the vessel and the coast guard decided to put it in plastic bags and bury them along the coast of the Magdalen Islands.

The inhabitants are asking that the area be cleaned up by removing the bags and making the area fit for the Magdalen Islanders.

• (1810)

[English]

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to present a petition certified by the Clerk of Petitions, concerning the protection of human life from conception until natural death.

Some time ago in the United States, insurance companies were disallowing medical procedures on unborn children. As a consequence, the minister of health and social services amended the definition of “child” to be a person under 19, including the period from conception to birth.

On the week in which the March for Life will take place on Parliament Hill, the petitioners would like to point out that Canada is a country which respects human rights and includes in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that everyone has the right to life. Also, it has been 40 years since May 14, 1969 when Parliament changed the law to permit abortion, and since January 28, 1988 Canada has no law to protect the lives of unborn children.

The petitioners therefore call upon Parliament to pass legislation for the protection of human life from the time of conception until natural death.

* * *

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. 100 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 100—**Mr. Jack Harris:**

With respect to equipment issued to personnel of Crown corporations, agencies, organizations and departments, on an annual basis over the last four years: (a) how many uniforms, firearms, explosive devices, stun grenades, tasers, and pepper spray canisters have been lost in this period; (b) to which Crown entity did the items belong; (c) when and in which locations did they go missing; (d) what is the estimated cost of these losses, by item; (e) how many vehicles were stolen during this period; (f) to which Crown entity did the vehicles belong; (g) when and in which locations did they go missing; (h) what is the estimated cost of these losses, by incident; (i) how many security passes have gone missing from locations that could pose a threat to national security or public safety; (j) to which facilities did the passes belong; (k) in which month and year were the losses reported; (l) what was the evaluated security threat posed by each loss; (m) how many laptop computers containing information sensitive to national security have gone missing; (n) to which facilities did the computers belong; (o) on which month and year were the losses reported; and (p) what was the evaluated security threat posed by each loss?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***FAMILY HOMES ON RESERVES AND MATRIMONIAL INTERESTS OR RIGHTS ACT**

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC) moved that Bill C-8, An Act respecting family homes situated on First Nation reserves and matrimonial interests or rights in or to structures and lands situated on those reserves, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my support for Bill C-8, Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act.

[Translation]

We have before us in Canada, an inexcusable and intolerable situation that has gone on far too long. Before I discuss this bill, it is important to have a sound understanding of matrimonial rights and interests.

[English]

An inexcusable and intolerable situation has gone on for far too long in Canada. Before I discuss the main planks of the bill, it is important to have a basic understanding of matrimonial rights and interests.

Matrimonial real property, or MRP, typically refers to the family home where both spouses in a marriage or common law relationship live on reserve. For almost all Canadians, provincial and territorial laws protect the MRP rights and interests of both spouses in the event of separation, divorce or death. These laws address a wide range of circumstances. If the family home is sold, for instance, both spouses must share in the proceeds. These laws also authorize a judge to order a spouse to temporarily leave the family home, particularly in cases of domestic violence and physical abuse.

Shamefully, these same laws that all Canadians take for granted do not apply on reserve. Spouses who live in communities governed by the Indian Act are afforded no such protection. This is because the Indian Act does not address the issue, and past governments have failed to remedy this glaring omission through legislation. As a result, relationship breakdowns in first nations communities often lead to homelessness and poverty, particularly for women and children.

Although each victim's situation is unique, we can all envision the following type of unfortunate and sad scenario: A husband and wife and their family live together in a house on first nations land. The marriage breaks down, who knows why, and the husband forces his wife and children to leave the family home. The woman has no legal recourse. She must find another place for her and her children to live. Often she has no choice but to leave the community. She is homeless. She is impoverished. Meanwhile, no court in the land can prevent the husband from selling the home and pocketing the cash.

● (1815)

[Translation]

It is unacceptable that this scenario continues to play out in Canada in the 21st century. Parliament must act. This bill would quickly remedy this legal void.

[English]

In highlighting the importance of this Parliament passing Bill C-8, I want to stress four important aspects of this legislation.

First, our Conservative government fully recognizes that first nations are best placed to make choices about the balance between the rights of first nations and the collective property rights. They are in the best position to develop those laws. That is why Bill C-8 describes a process for first nations communities to develop and enact their own laws in this area. That is the first thing. Let us allow first nations to develop the laws that apply in their situation on reserve. I think all sides of the House recognize that.

Second, while first nations develop their own laws, a remedy for vulnerable citizens living on reserve is urgently required. Bill C-8 proposes the immediate application of interim federal protection on reserves similar to those enjoyed by all other Canadians.

Third, the bill was developed after exhaustive study, authoritative research and comprehensive consultation with first nations groups.

Finally, Bill C-8 complements this government's larger initiatives to protect the rights and interests of first nations people. Again, I would point out that Bill C-21, which we passed in the last Parliament, was supported by all sides of the House. For the first time it brought the application of the Canadian Human Rights Act to bear on people living on reserve.

The first element of Bill C-8 provides an enabling process for first nations to establish MRP regimes of their own, regimes based on the cultural and social norms of their communities. To create such a law, a first nation must hold a fair and democratic vote on its proposed MRP legislation that must be approved by the entire community.

Laws that meet these conditions are not subject to review, consideration or rejection by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development or by the department. In other words, as first nations develop those laws based on their community customs, they bring them forward and have them endorsed at the community level. I cannot intervene, nor should I, in making sure that those would be the laws of application for that particular community.

Government Orders

The next element of the proposed legislation goes hand in hand with my first reason for supporting Bill C-8. It sets out a federal regime that will immediately protect the MRP rights and interests of first nations spouses and common law partners. The regime would provide residents of first nations communities with access to legal recourse similar to that available to all other Canadians. This would close the unacceptable legislative gap that currently exists. It will protect some of the most vulnerable Canadians who right now have no protection in case of that marital breakdown.

Our outright support for Bill C-8 is also based on the fact that the proposed legislation is founded on a sizable body of sound research and an exhaustive consultation. There are multiple standing committee reports with all parties voicing support, having recommended a swift and enduring legislative solution. International groups, including the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, reached similar conclusions.

A comprehensive consultation process also informs the legislation now before us. In 2006 a collaborative process facilitated by the esteemed Wendy Grant-John and involving the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations saw 103 consultative sessions held at 76 different sites across the country. In fact, over \$8 million was provided to the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations to carry out a consultative process. We wanted input and we got it.

This government also went to great lengths to create a legislative solution that would satisfy all stakeholders. Our proposal was largely based on the results of the consultations and many of Wendy Grant-John's thoughtful recommendations. A draft legislative proposal was then shared with key stakeholders, including the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Women's Association of Canada, the First Nations Lands Advisory Board and the provinces and territories. Their input resulted in significant improvements to the legislation before us today.

I would also point out that Bill C-47, this bill's predecessor, has been in the public domain for all to see and review for a full year now. It passed at second reading in the 39th Parliament. I think members on all sides of the House wanted to get this into committee for further evaluation and study, knowing that we need to address this legislative gap. That is why it passed in the last Parliament with all-party support.

• (1820)

The proposed legislation incorporates the ideas put forward and addresses concerns expressed during many years of study, analysis and discussion.

Virtually every first nation group in Canada that spoke to this issue during the consultation strongly opposed the application of provincial laws, so that option was discarded. To respond to those who demanded that any solution address the cultural values and traditions of first nation communities, Bill C-8 provides a process for first nations to develop their own culturally specific laws on the issue.

At the same time, the national approach taken in this bill will ensure that the immediate protection provided will be consistent for first nations across the country. In other words, it will apply

immediately, but first nations are encouraged to bring in their own laws, and I am sure many of them will do so quickly, developed in their own communities that under this legislation will supersede the national standards in this act. It will have the stand-alone, community based, community endorsed, community ratified solution for that particular first nation. That is as it should be, in our opinion, and that is why this deserves broad support.

Some groups also raised concerns about the implementation of a federal MRP regime. There are two answers to this.

First, as I have mentioned, this legislation takes the minister and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs out of the picture regarding first nations MRP laws on reserves. Instead, this bill recognizes that first nations, not the federal government, are best placed to make these decisions related to MRP.

We have taken many measures to ensure that even during the time when the interim federal protection applies, collective interests are well balanced with individual needs. That is important for first nations. They need to know that the reserve property that is owned collectively is not going to be sold out from underneath them. This cannot happen under this legislation. No one ever intended that and we were careful to make sure that the protection and balance is in this legislation. Again all of it was done with the intent that first nations will develop their own MRP laws that will be community specific and ratified in the local community.

Given that implementation concerns cannot be readily addressed in the legislation itself—we cannot answer all these questions that way—the Government of Canada plans to establish a centre of excellence to support first nations and to deliver training and information sessions to law enforcement and court officials. It will be a place where best practices are maintained. A repository of information and research material will be there for first nations that are in the midst of developing their own laws for their own communities.

These actions touch upon my final point.

Bill C-8 is part of a much larger strategy to improve the quality of life experienced by residents of first nations communities. This strategy involves working in collaboration with first nations organizations and other willing partners to identify and attack the root causes of injustice and inequity.

This strategy has already produced tangible results on a variety of issues and a comprehensive plan developed in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations. A good example is the specific claims legislation that this government brought in. It addresses the unacceptable backlog of hundreds and hundreds of claims. First nations have been looking for some 40 years for laws to give some assurance that these will be settled in a timely fashion.

We worked with first nations. We brought in that legislation. That plan was endorsed by Parliament to establish an independent tribunal to adjudicate these claims. I mentioned earlier Bill C-21 and the issue of the application of the Canadian Human Rights Act. It is another good example of how that kind of application on reserve, specific claims on reserve and a record number of treaty land entitlement resolutions that we have had especially on the Prairies, all point to addressing those long-standing issues in order to address other inequities and inequalities in the system, and certainly that is what we are eager to do.

As I mentioned, this will be, in my opinion, the flagship human rights legislation introduced in this Parliament, certainly by me. It deals with something that has been a legislative gap for far too long. It is something that other Canadians take for granted. It is time we addressed that gap. Some people and some communities talk about human rights. Some other countries talk about the importance of human rights; Canada certainly does, but we are acting on this basic human right.

● (1825)

I believe Bill C-8 offers another historic opportunity to better protect the basic rights of first nations people.

The legislation asks the members of this House two fundamental questions. First, should this country extend the legal rights, recourses and protections enjoyed by all other Canadians, and should we extend that, with this legislation, to first nations communities?

Second, should first nations have the power to develop MRP laws that reflect the cultural and social traditions of their communities? That is the flip side of the same coin.

In my opinion, the answer is yes, we must move to protect the most vulnerable in society, to fill that legislative gap as quickly as possible, to ensure that first nation communities, and especially the vulnerable in first nation communities, have the access to rights that all other Canadians enjoy.

Equally as important, the flip side of that same coin is that we on this side of the House support first nations developing their own MRP laws to address that gap. When they address that gap, it will be approved in their local communities. They will address it in a way that is sensitive to their local situation and their social norms and their cultural traditions.

Once that is done, passed and ratified, then the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs cannot interfere in first nations' proper exercise of their authority to develop that MRP law of their own. That is essential to the flip side of this important coin.

It is my hope that hon. colleagues here today and in the days to come at committee will do the right thing and will do the honourable thing, which I think is to stand up for the most vulnerable in society and support Bill C-8 through all stages in this House and in committee so that first nations can enjoy the same rights as every other Canadian.

When we went through the debate on Bill C-21 in the last Parliament, there was concern about trying to achieve perfection. We talked about whether it was the right time to do this, whether we

could have done something more, and whether we could have consulted more. In this case, we have consulted at over 100 different community meetings.

I suppose we could always say we could more. We could spend more money on consultations. We could extend it indefinitely into the future. But at some point we have to come down solidly and say, enough is enough, it is time to extend this right that every other Canadian knows in their heart and has experienced, sometimes unfortunately has experienced it in the courts, but at least they have a way to address this longstanding issue in their community.

I would just ask people to wrap their head around this. What would one say to that first nation lady who is looking for some access to the matrimonial real property that she and her husband have built over the years? She might say, "Unfortunately the marriage has broken down, but I could get off to the next step by getting half of the assets of the matrimonial property and move forward, maybe into another home or into another situation, looking after my children".

We need to say to that lady or that man, "We are there for you. We will do the right thing in this Parliament of Canada. We will extend to you the same rights as every other Canadian." We are going to do it starting today, and we are going to do it as quickly as we can.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

● (1830)

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs a question concerning Omar Khadr on February 23, 2009. The question has been asked repeatedly to try to make the government understand that everyone in Quebec and Canada unanimously agrees that Mr. Khadr should be repatriated, everyone that is, except the government.

Not only has Mr. Khadr received the support of all opposition parties, the Canadian Bar Association and the entire legal community, but now a Federal Court ruling has ordered the government to repatriate Mr. Khadr. That ruling carries a lot of weight, and we were surprised to see the federal government appeal the decision. One must wonder if it decided to appeal simply to stall for time. Fundamentally, there is no doubt that the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which relates to child soldiers, applies to Mr. Khadr. Under that convention, in the case of a child soldier, his or her country is responsible for reintegrating him or her into society. Furthermore, Mr. Khadr's lawyer and his family have made some proposals in that regard. In short, we are astonished by the position currently being taken by the federal government.

Adjournment Proceedings

It made that decision when Mr. Bush was still President of the United States. We know about Mr. Bush's attitude toward torture and security. Security was more important to him than human rights. It is frightening to see the Conservative government follow in his footsteps.

Today, I asked a question in the House in the hope of better understanding the government's reasons for appealing the Federal Court's ruling, which is substantial and well-founded. The federal government has no reason to do this.

The government could have saved face had it accepted the Federal Court's ruling and repatriated Mr. Khadr. The government could have decided to submit him to the legal process if necessary. It could have reintegrated him into our society because he was once a child soldier. He was a minor when the crimes he is charged with were committed, crimes of which he has never been convicted. He should have been treated according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Government of Canada signed that convention.

Today, Canadians and Quebecers alike wonder why the federal government has decided to do this. It did the same thing in the case of a Canadian citizen who was convicted in the United States, a citizen whom it refused to defend. It did not try to save him from the death penalty. It still has the same attitude toward Mr. Abdelrazik.

We want the government to show that it understands the Federal Court's message and bring Mr. Khadr back to Canada. That is what this particular Canadian citizen deserves. I hope that the government will act accordingly, change its mind, grant Mr. Khadr his rights and bring him home to Canada.

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we well know, in 2002, Omar Khadr was arrested by U.S. forces in the context of his alleged involvement in the armed conflict in Afghanistan following his alleged recruitment and use as a combatant by al-Qaeda. Mr. Khadr continues to face charges pursuant to U.S. legislation.

These are serious charges under any legal system and they are before a U.S. court. As such, it is up to the U.S. authorities to make decisions regarding the appropriate mechanisms to deal with the disposition of the case currently pending against Mr. Khadr.

It bears repeating that there are very serious charges facing Mr. Khadr, including murder and attempted murder, as well as other terrorism-related offences. News reports recently showed video footage of Mr. Khadr allegedly building and planting improvised explosive devices in Afghanistan, the very devices that have taken the lives of dozens of Canadian men and women.

We simply cannot prejudge the outcome of proceedings currently under way in the United States pursuant to those charges, nor can we prejudge the final outcome of the review and eventual resolution of Mr. Khadr's case. We know that the U.S. administration is currently actively seized with the issue, as reflected by executive orders issued in January by President Obama.

The Canadian government has consistently asserted that it would be improper to interfere in the process put in place by the United

States and we maintain this position in light of the work being undertaken by the United States to address the situation of Guantanamo Bay detainees as we speak.

Our government's decision to appeal the April 23, 2009, decision of the Federal Court of Canada regarding Mr. Khadr's repatriation, issued after careful consideration of the legal merits of doing so, is in keeping with our long-held position. This is further in accordance with our respect for the judicial sovereignty of the United States and allowing the process to play itself out without inappropriate intervention.

The work being presently undertaken by the United States to address the situation of detainees in Guantanamo Bay will assist in determining whether, among other things, detainees should be released or transferred or whether they should face prosecution and under what court.

As a Canadian citizen, Mr. Khadr's case is of interest to the Government of Canada and his treatment at the hands of the U.S. authorities. Regular, ongoing welfare visits have been carried out by Canadian officials in Guantanamo Bay in order to assess Mr. Khadr's condition, to provide him with a measure of support and to facilitate the provision of comfort items to him. Canadian officials will continue to visit with Mr. Khadr and will continue, as before, to assist in making arrangements for telephone calls between Mr. Khadr and his family.

Further, the Canadian government has facilitated access to him by Canadian legal defence counsel. The Government of Canada has also repeatedly requested that Mr. Khadr be provided with educational opportunities while in detention at Guantanamo and that he be provided with an independent medical and psychological assessment.

● (1835)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, my colleague makes it seem as though it was not the Federal Court of Canada that declared that Mr. Khadr had to be repatriated. This is no longer the position of the opposition party or a lawyer, but that of the Federal Court, which ruled that the federal government must repatriate Mr. Khadr.

The federal government has decided to appeal this decision. How can it appeal a decision when we know that Mr. Khadr was a child soldier? As such, he has rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was signed by Canada.

Are the Conservatives simply trying to buy time to defend an ideological position that only the government supports?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Abbott: Mr. Speaker, as mentioned, a review process is currently in place pursuant to the executive orders issued by President Obama on January 22, 2009. These orders reflect the president's stated intention to close down the detention facilities at Guantanamo Bay.

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In keeping with that intention, a review process is under way to assist in making determinations regarding disposition of the cases against detainees facing proceedings, such as Mr. Khadr. The Government of Canada intends to let that process run its course and will not interfere with the United States in its undertakings.

Our decision to appeal the recent Federal Court of Canada ruling regarding Mr. Khadr's repatriation was taken after careful consideration of legal merits of doing so and is consistent with that position. We will, of course, follow all developments regarding Mr. Khadr's case closely and will be prepared to respond appropriately to decisions taken by the United States at the culmination of the review period.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 13, I asked a question about negotiations with the Association of Justice Counsel.

Let us go back to the presentation of the last Conservative budget and the introduction of Bill C-10, Budget Implementation Act, 2009.

• (1840)

[*English*]

The Conservatives have resorted to an underhanded strategy. They have tabled an omnibus bill that includes amendments to other legislation such as the Navigable Waters Protection Act and measures to restrain government spending, particularly in the area of pay increases.

[*Translation*]

We, Liberals, supported that budget reluctantly to help Canadians in need pull through this financial crisis as quickly as possible.

[*English*]

The Conservatives have taken advantage of an opportunity to penalize their public service. The bill limits pay increases for federal public servants to 1.5% annually, from 2008-09 to 2010-11, despite the collective agreements in effect.

[*Translation*]

What is the impact of these provisions? It is extremely important. The Conservatives are being sued by two unions: the Public Service Alliance of Canada, and the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada.

These two unions represent over 215,000 members. Their voice is important and we must listen to them. What do they have against the Conservatives? They are upset by the Conservatives' decision to restrict the power to fully negotiate the salaries and wages of public servants. This would violate the freedom of association guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the right to collective bargaining recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada.

That situation is unfair to our public servants, but it is even more so in the case of the over 2,000 lawyers who work for the Government of Canada. Let me explain. In 2003, the lawyers and notaries obtained from Parliament permission to negotiate a first collective agreement. Unfortunately, because the parties could not

agree, they resorted to mediation. Since that did not work either, the parties went to arbitration.

The problem is that the two sides could not agree on a fair remuneration before Bill C-10 was passed. This means that the union is now forced to accept salary increases that are based on a scale that goes back more than 20 years.

That situation is unfair. It puts Government of Canada lawyers in seventh place, in terms of salaries. For example, the starting salary of a federal government lawyer is 37% lower than that of his Ontario counterpart. Even though most Government of Canada lawyers live in Ontario, their salary is between 40% and 60% lower than that of their colleagues with the Ontario government.

How can the government attract young lawyers if it refuses to give them fair and equitable pay? Similarly, how can it keep its experienced professional lawyers, so that they will continue to protect our values and our rights?

Finally, this situation, which is unfair to begin with, exists in the context of the fight against crime, of which the Conservatives claim to be the standard bearers. On the one hand they create new offences, while on the other hand they reduce the resources allowing us to prosecute criminals. That is nonsense. It is a fundamental contradiction and it is sheer hypocrisy.

My question is still valid: will the Conservatives reconsider their decision and change the salary base for counsel, on which salary increases provided under the 2009 Budget Implementation Act are based?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question.

[*English*]

The hon. member says that measures contained in the latest budget violate the provisions of the Charter of Rights. That is a very serious charge. One wonders, then, why he voted for it. He then said that the measures were unjust, and he voted for it. He said that the budget took away pay equity rights, and he voted for that, too.

One has to wonder why the hon. member would vote for something he believes have done all those allegedly terrible things. For sure the member can be counted on for that, and that is to be ferociously critical in his support of the budget.

In a sense he is really criticizing himself because he is opposing, today, something that he voted for in this place only a few weeks ago. Not only did he vote in favour of it once, but he voted in favour of it at all three readings. Then all of his Liberal colleagues did the exact same thing in the Senate.

Canadians can be forgiven if they are finding it difficult to follow the member or his leader. Given that we are talking about budget measures and given that the member will be rising in a few moments, it is appropriate to ask him to put his formidable debate skills to work in explaining what his leader meant when he said, "We will have to raise taxes". He uttered that on April 14, in Kitchener.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1845)

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Can you say that again? I didn't quite get it.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, a member in the House has said that she did not hear it, so I will repeat. He said, on April 14, "We will have to raise taxes". He also said, on December 18, "I'm not going to take a GST hike off the table".

He said that he supported a carbon tax. In fact, he was the father of the idea and led his party to adopt it in the last election campaign. He has written about it and he has supported it. As late as a couple of months ago, he indicated, once again, that he favoured taxing home heating fuel, the transportation of essential goods and services and a brand new tax that would apply to our factories and warehouses and all the industries, industries that are suffering right now under a global recession.

On this side of the House, we have Canada's economic action plan. It creates jobs building bridges, roads, communities centres and other construction projects. It helps contractors, painters and builders with a home renovation tax credit, which has caused a real boom in that sector. It cuts taxes for the average family by about \$500. It allows for a new tax-free savings account, which encourages families to invest in their future and allows them to keep all the capital gains and the interest accumulated for themselves tax-free.

That is our economic action plan.

The hon. member has a leader who says, "We will have to raise taxes". Apparently, that is the Liberal economic action plan, higher taxes in a time of recession or recovery. I do not think that makes the leader of the Liberal Party a bad person. He has every right to take that position, and I appreciate his honesty. He just has to explain which taxes he will raise, by how much and who will have to pay.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, my colleague obviously is trying to change the channel.

With regard to job creation, last week at committee the government's officials said that they were not tracking the creation of jobs, so the Conservatives do not have much to say about that.

Through their ideology, the Conservatives have made an enemy of the public service. They have abandoned our employees and made them bear the costs of this financial crisis, a crisis that they have both denied and ignored.

[*Translation*]

The Liberal Party has the utmost respect and admiration for our hard-working public servants and for what they do for Canadians every day. They have set an example by being willing to work with the government to enter into reasonable agreements.

[*English*]

Neither the Liberal Party nor I will forget the goodwill the public service unions have demonstrated.

[*Translation*]

Will this government recognize the efforts of the public service and enter into new equitable, reasonable collective agreements? Will

it give Government of Canada lawyers their due and adjust the salary bases?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that our government respects our public servants. That is why we decided to put an end to the Liberal practice of blaming public servants for the Liberals' historic scandals. We have put in place protection for whistleblowers, the same whistleblowers who were victims of abuse by the former Liberal regime during the sponsorship scandal.

Coming back to the present, the hon. member voted for our budget, but now he wants to criticize it. You cannot criticize something you just supported. That is what is called a flip-flop.

[*English*]

I would not want to accuse that member of engaging in such a thing, but it seems he has convicted himself before I had the chance.

[*Translation*]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some time ago, I asked two questions in this House about the economic situation and the recession. I asked the government, specifically the Minister of Finance, what his action plan would do to help Canadians get through the recession.

[*English*]

The Minister of Finance went on about how Obama and the G20 had called Canada's financial system and the way we regulated it a model for the G20.

Everyone knows it was a Liberal government that pushed back on the Reform Party and its successor, the Canadian Alliance, that wanted us to deregulate Canada's financial institution system and allow bank mergers. The Liberals said no. Our great financial institutions and our regulatory system are thanks to the Liberals.

I want to come back to the issue of the economy.

Canada's unemployment rate has hit 8%, the highest it has been in the past eight years. Since October, 320,000 jobs have been lost, that is net job loss. Youth unemployment, those Canadians under the age of 25, has hit a stunning 14.8%. That means more than 100,000 young Canadians under the age of 25 are starting their working lives unemployed. That brings me to the employment system itself.

According to all of the best statistics, only half as many Canadians qualify for EI today than during the last recession in the 1990s. The current EI system was not designed for a recession as severe as what we are currently experiencing. In fact, according to Stats Canada, a staggering 325,700 EI claims were received by the government in February. That is up 51,000, or 18% from January. This is the single largest number of EI claims since, at least, 1997, when the tracking of EI data first began. The total number of regular EI beneficiaries has climbed 22% since October 2008. This means that as of the end of April, 610,250 Canadians are collecting benefits.

Adjournment Proceedings

The system, as it stands right now, was not designed for a recession. It was designed for an economic boom, when the government was in surplus, when Canadians did not have difficulty finding jobs at all. In fact, companies and the private sector were having difficulty filling jobs because jobs were being created so rapidly.

The Conservative government is refusing to recognize that and is refusing to modify the EI system to respond to a recession situation. It is refusing to make EI more accessible to more Canadians who have worked and who have paid into it.

Again, when will the government establish a single uniform qualifier for EI of 360 hours? That is the limit. That is what it should be.

• (1850)

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I share the hon. member's concern for the unemployed in this country. We all do and we are all working as best we can to ensure those people get back to work as soon as possible.

I would, however, ask the hon. member to go back and check her figures. In its last report, Statistics Canada stated that since December 2006 we are still net 200,000 new jobs. There has been job losses, no argument, but let us be true with the facts, especially when we say them in this House.

Without a doubt, Canada is in the midst of a global economic recession. Its impacts are real and it is affecting employment rates throughout Canada and throughout the world, but again this is a global recession, not a made-in-Canada recession.

While Canada, as recognized by the IMF and the OECD, is in the strongest positioned to weather it, we are not immune and we will be affected. As RBC economist, Patricia Croft, noted in a recent CTV News interview, "This is not a made-in-Canada recession...but because we're a small open economy we've been caught up...But I do think there are reasons to be hopeful...there is a great story to tell about Canada in that we may come out of this recession much stronger than our global counterparts".

Indeed, we are working with our global counterparts on a global solution and, as witnessed at the recent G20 summit, Canada is increasingly being seen as a model for that solution. As President Barack Obama stated in a *New York Times Magazine* interview:

Canada being a good example...they've actually done a good job in managing through what was a pretty risky period in the financial markets.

We also recognize the necessity to protect our Canadian economy right now and that is why we have Canada's economic action plan. This is a real plan that takes real action, a plan that has been endorsed by business leaders, economists, public interests groups, as well as Parliament.

A key component of our plan is immediate and significant tax relief to help Canadians weather this period of economic uncertainty,

tax relief that injects \$20 billion of stimulus into Canada's economy over this and the next five years, tax cuts that include increasing the amount Canadians can earn tax free, slashing the two lowest personal income tax brackets, doubling the working income tax benefit, increasing tax savings for seniors with an enlargement of the age credit amount, and much more. Tax relief that Canadians welcomed, as the Retail Council of Canada noted:

These tax changes will put money back in the pockets of Canadians, boosting confidence and encouraging spending, which is critical to the retail sector and Canada's overall economic recovery.

Unfortunately, the Liberal leader does not agree with lower taxes. He believes Canadians are not paying enough taxes and that families and seniors need to send more of their hard-earned money to politicians in Ottawa. We disagree. To quote the Liberal leader, "Federal taxes must go up...we will have to raise taxes". I repeat, Conservatives do not agree with that.

• (1855)

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, clearly the Conservative government had no trouble breaking a promise, increasing taxes and creating a tax on income trusts, which it said in the 2006 election that it would never do and it was over 30% tax on income trusts. It bilked over two million Canadian pensioners out of something like \$25 billion. It had no problem doing that.

I want to come back to the EI. Scientific studies and expert economists have all concluded that employment insurance is eight times more effective than the entire tax system at mitigating the impact of a recession. For every dollar of EI that is paid out in benefits, \$1.61 were put into the economy.

When will the government make EI accessible to Canadians who have worked and paid into it? When will it establish 360 hours as the qualifier to be eligible for EI?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, while we are clearly pleased with the positive job numbers for April, we recognize this will continue to be a difficult year. Canada will likely continue to see significant job losses and that is why we remain cautious and vigilant.

We will continue to implement our plan to help create and maintain jobs, while opposing the Liberal leader's tax hike plan. For those wondering why the Liberals would endorse such a discredited tax hike plan, this is what the Liberal member for Kings—Hants said, "Neither the Liberal caucus or the Liberal Party has ever encountered a problem that they did not believe to be best solved by throwing copious quantities of taxpayers' money at it. They are tax and spend-aholics".

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

(The House adjourned at 6:59 p.m.)

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