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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 11, 2010

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 11, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

ELIMINATING PARDONS FOR SERIOUS CRIME ACT

Hon. Gerry Ritz (for the Minister of Public Safety) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Criminal Records Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I apologize to my colleagues. I was delayed in the lobby but I was wondering if I could seek unanimous consent to return to tabling of documents.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to return to tabling of documents?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their permission to return to this part of routine proceedings.

Pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to nine petitions.

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[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions this morning.

The first one was signed by several hundreds of citizens calling upon the House of Commons to adopt a universal declaration on animal welfare. This petition stresses the contribution of animals to our ecosystem. Animals are essential to the food chain in many

countries. There are also pets. I need not make a long speech about how important animals are in human life. Therefore, this petition calls for a universal declaration on animal welfare.

• (1005)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my second petition was signed by 2,222 people who were disappointed with the government's decision not to allow the third reading of the bill to eliminate the employment insurance waiting period. Tens of thousands of people have already signed petitions, which were tabled in the House. This petition is another in that series of petitions to impress upon the government the need to take steps to eliminate the waiting period so that people no longer have to wait for two weeks after they have the misfortune of losing their jobs.

[*English*]

SRI LANKA

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting a petition on behalf of Canadians of Tamil origin.

May marks the one year ending of the war in Sri Lanka. As we know, thousands and thousands of persons were killed in that war and there is still no durable political solution. The petition asks the Canadian government to engage both the Sri Lankan government and the international community to seek a long-lasting political solution and to assist the persons who are still jailed in the barbed wire camps in Sri Lanka.

The United Nations High Commissioner has called for an investigation into the various war crimes or killings that occurred, especially near the end of the war. The petition seeks engagement on that issue as well.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to present today.

The first petition deals with human trafficking. The petitioners state that the trafficking of women and children for the purpose of sexual exploitation should be condemned and that it is the duty of Parliament to protect the most vulnerable members of society from harm, those being victims of human trafficking.

The petitioners request that Parliament amend the Criminal Code to include a minimum punishment of imprisonment for a term of five years for the offence involving trafficking of persons under the age of 18.

Routine Proceedings

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is regarding the long gun registry.

The petitioners state that the long gun registry was originally budgeted to cost Canadians \$2 million but that the price tag has spiraled out of control, to an estimated \$2 billion a decade later, that the registry has not saved one single life since it was introduced.

The petitioners state that they would rather see their tax dollars keeping guns out of the hands of criminals and gangs instead out of the hands of law-abiding citizens.

SKIN CANCER

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last petition is regarding skin cancer.

The petitioners state that one in seven Canadians will develop skin cancer in their lifetime, that melanoma is the most serious type of skin cancer and one of the most rapidly increasing cancers in Canada and that education, resources and treatment are extremely limited.

The petitioners call for support for a national skin cancer and melanoma initiative to provide much needed access to newer drug treatments and funding for research and educational programs.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The first petition was signed by dozens of Manitobans calling for equal employment insurance benefits for adoptive parents. Under the current EI program, adoptive parents have 35 weeks of paid leave, followed by a further 15 weeks of unpaid leave. The biological mother is given both the first 35 weeks and the latter 15 weeks as paid leave.

We all know that adoptions are very expensive, lengthy and stressful to the adoptive parents and their families. Recent studies have shown that an additional 15 weeks of paid leave would help parents to support their adopted children and help them through a very difficult period in their life.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to support Bill C-413 tabled by the MP for Burnaby—New Westminster, which would amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Canada Labour Code to ensure that an adoptive parent is entitled to the same number of weeks of paid leave as a biological mother of a newborn child.

• (1010)

EARTHQUAKE IN CHILE

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the second petition was also signed by dozens of Canadians.

The petitioners are calling upon the Canadian government to match funds personally donated by the citizens of Canada for the victims of the Chilean earthquake. Members will know and we will soon find out next week, I believe, that the earthquake caused massive damage in southern Chile and the communities in Canada are organizing raising funds for Chilean earthquake relief. There is another social coming up in Winnipeg, I believe, on May 22.

The question that people are asking every day is: When will the Prime Minister give the same treatment to the Chilean earthquake victims as he did for the victims of the Haitian earthquake and match funds personally donated by Canadians to help the victims of the Chilean earthquake?

[*Translation*]

ANIMAL WELFARE

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour of presenting two petitions signed by many Canadians who are calling upon the House to pass animal welfare legislation to effectively improve the condition of animals and promote animal welfare in Canada.

These petitions suggest that Bill S-203, which provided for stiffer sentences for criminal offences relating to animal cruelty, was without effect. Therefore, the petitioners call upon the government, through the House of Commons, to bring in serious sentences for offences relating to animal welfare.

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[*English*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 172 and 181.

[*Text*]

Question No. 172—**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:**

With respect to support for Canadian veterans: (a) why does the government provide up to \$13,000 for funeral and burial expenses for Canadian Forces members, but \$3,600 for Canadian veterans' funerals; and (b) when will the government increase the financial support it provides to veterans' families for funerals and burials?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to a) There are differences between the funeral and burial programs of the Canadian Forces and of Veterans Affairs Canada. The Canadian Forces' funeral and burial program is part of the employee benefit package available to serving members. The main goal of Veterans Affairs Canada's program is to ensure eligible Veterans receive a dignified funeral and burial.

Veterans Affairs Canada is always looking for ways to improve the program and is actively working on the matter to ensure that the level of support provided continues to allow a dignified funeral and burial.

With regard to b) Information regarding changes to the funeral and burial program will be communicated as soon as it is available. Veterans Affairs Canada is committed to addressing this situation.

Business of Supply

Question No. 181—**Mr. Pat Martin:**

Since 2006, what grants, contributions, contracts or loan guarantees were applied for either through a crown corporation, department or agency of the government by the holdings of the “blind trust” of Rahim Jaffer, or businesses owned or partially owned by Mr. Jaffer, including (i) the source and dollar amount, (ii) date made, (iii) reason(s) for providing or denying the funding, (iv) present status of the grant, contribution or loan guarantee (whether repaid, partially repaid, or unpaid, including the value of the repayment), (v) in the case of contracts, whether the contract is fulfilled, whether it was tendered and any reason for limiting the tender?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government consulted the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner of Canada, an agent of Parliament independent of the Government of Canada, with respect to this question.

Section 31 of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons provides that the commissioner shall retain all documents relating to a member for a period of 12 months after he or she ceases to be a member, after which the documents shall be destroyed.

Since Mr. Rahim Jaffer was not re-elected in the October 2008 federal election, the Office of the Commissioner no longer holds documentation pertaining to Mr. Jaffer.

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[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Furthermore, Madam Speaker, if Questions Nos. 163 and 164 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 163—**Mr. Harold Albrecht:**

With respect to the use of the government-owned fleet of Challenger jets from January 2002 until January 2006 and for each use of the aircraft: (a) what are the names and titles of the passengers present on the flight manifest; (b) what were all the departure and arrival points of the aircraft; (c) who requested access to the fleet; (d) who authorized the flight; (e) what is the number of flying hours accumulated; and (f) what are the associated costs?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 164—**Mr. Todd Russell:**

With respect to Senators travelling with the Prime Minister or any other Minister of the Crown outside of Canada during the period of January 1, 2007 to March 25, 2010: (a) what are the names of all Senators who have travelled outside of Canada with the Prime Minister or any other Minister of the Crown; (b) what is the political party affiliation of each individual Senator; (c) to and from where did each Senator travel; (d) what were the dates of each trip; (e) what are the names of all Senators and spouses or partners who have travelled on airplanes operated by the government; (f) what was the total cost of each trip broken down by (i) air travel, (ii) accommodations, (iii) per diem, (iv) meals, (v) hospitality, (vi) other expenses; and (g) who paid all travel-related expenses in (f)?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—QUEBEC'S TRADITIONAL DEMANDS

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ) moved:

That this House acknowledge that federalism cannot be renewed, since 20 years after the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, Quebec still does not have the power to choose three justices on the Supreme Court of Canada, or to opt out with compensation from federal programs in its areas of jurisdiction, nor does it have a real veto over constitutional amendments and its status as a nation still has not been recognized in the Canadian Constitution.

He said: Madam Speaker, I would like to share my time with the member for Quebec, who so kindly supported this motion. I will read the motion again because I think it symbolizes the role of the Bloc Québécois in the House. As I have mentioned on many occasions, the Bloc Québécois is the only party that defends Quebec's interests and values unconditionally in the House and it cannot make any compromise when the National Assembly passes a unanimous resolution to state its position.

In this case, we have another role, that of leaders of the sovereignist movement, which is very present in all of Quebec society. As defender of Quebec's interests and values, it is also our party's responsibility to report to the House the fact that Canadian federalism cannot be renewed. A survey, which I will talk about throughout my speech, led to this conclusion.

But first, I will read the motion again:

That this House acknowledge that federalism cannot be renewed, since 20 years after the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, Quebec still does not have the power to choose three justices on the Supreme Court of Canada, or to opt out with compensation from federal programs in its areas of jurisdiction, nor does it have a real veto over constitutional amendments and its status as a nation still has not been recognized in the Canadian Constitution.

Those were the minimum conditions stipulated by the Government of Quebec, when Robert Bourassa was premier, during a round of negotiations launched by former Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

Quebec had set five conditions that many of us, particularly on the sovereignist side, found insufficient but that had been agreed to by the first ministers. Unfortunately for Mr. Bourassa, that agreement failed because certain provinces reneged on their commitments. Some technicalities also played a role in preventing the Meech Lake accord from being ratified by two provinces. So that process failed.

Business of Supply

Twenty years later, how does public opinion in Quebec and Canada respond to those same demands? On that point, we conducted a survey, in collaboration with *Intellectuels pour la souveraineté*, and we asked the same questions as the terms of the Meech Lake accord.

So we started with question one. The Canadian Constitution should recognize that Quebec forms a nation. At the time, the term was distinct society. Now, the debate has evolved, and even in the House, it was recognized that Quebecers formed a nation. I may have occasion to return to this. So the question was asked, and there was quite a difference between the answers in Canada and in Quebec.

In Quebec, 73% of Quebecers think that the Canadian Constitution should recognize that Quebec forms a nation, and only 27% are opposed. That is practically the reverse of what we find in Canada, and even more so, since 83% of Canadians are opposed to the status of Quebec as a nation being recognized in the Canadian Constitution. So right away, we see that the first condition of the Meech Lake accord is not remotely acceptable to the Canadian public, but is still something that the Quebec nation wants.

The second point is: the Canadian Constitution should give Quebec a veto over any constitutional amendment. That also appeared in the terms of the Meech Lake accord. What is the answer? Unsurprisingly, we find that 72% of Quebecers do believe that Quebec should have a veto over any constitutional amendment, and 28% are opposed.

Once again, the ratio is reversed when we ask Canadians the same question, because 82% of them reject the idea of Quebec having a veto over any constitutional amendment. Only 18% are in favour, representing a tiny minority of the Canadian nation.

Another condition was approved in the Meech Lake accord: the Canadian Constitution should give Quebec the right to opt out of any federal program in areas under its jurisdiction, with financial compensation. This refers to areas under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces.

•(1015)

In Quebec, 70% of people agree, and in Canada, 81% of Canadians disagree. The two nations are symmetrically opposite. Once again, I am referring only to the minimum conditions agreed upon in the round of negotiations that led to the Meech Lake accord 20 years ago.

Another point in the accord is that the Canadian Constitution should give Quebec full jurisdiction over immigration to Quebec. In Quebec, 78% agree, and in Canada, 77% disagree. There again, we see that Canadian public opinion shows absolutely no openness to Quebec's most traditional demands, its minimum demands.

Now, on the question of the division of powers, it said that the Canadian Constitution should give Quebec the power to select three justices on the Supreme Court of Canada. As we know, three justices come from Quebec, but they are not selected by the government of Quebec or the National Assembly. That was in the Meech Lake accord, and the question is being asked again. We see that 83% of Quebecers believe that yes, the three Supreme Court judges should be appointed by Quebec, while 73% of Canadians are opposed. That

is another condition of the Meech Lake accord that has become unacceptable to the Canadian nation.

More generally, Canadians and Quebecers were asked whether another round of negotiations should be undertaken to find a satisfactory constitutional arrangement for Quebec. I remind the House that Pierre Elliott Trudeau's unilateral repatriation of the Constitution in 1982 was without the agreement of Quebec, which has never signed the Constitution, regardless of whether its government was federalist or sovereignist. This reflects the broad consensus in Quebec that the Constitution fails miserably to meet the needs and aspirations of the Quebec nation.

Would Canada be prepared, therefore, to open another round of negotiations not only to meet the minimal demands of the Meech Lake accord but also to meet the conditions of the current Quebec government for resolving this issue? Eighty-two percent of Quebecers think there should be another round of negotiations to meet Quebec traditional constitutional demands, while 61% of Canadians think there should not be.

It is interesting that all the answers I mentioned are always in the 70% to 80% range and really show the Quebec political nation at work. This is not just francophones, or sovereignists, or allophones, or the English Quebec minority. This is a majority of Quebecers who say they need these additional powers, while a majority of Canadians also react as a political nation and say they are not interested in ceding them.

These results are hardly surprising. The pollster who did the survey, Pierre Drouilly, said he expected something of the kind. The problem is that we did not expect such a huge disparity in the results. There has been a real hardening of Canadian public opinion vis-à-vis Quebec's demands, while in Quebec, a broad consensus has emerged around the powers that Quebec needs in order to develop.

We have two nations, therefore, on completely opposed paths, and even if the federalist parties in the House refuse to re-open the Constitution, it is obvious that things cannot go on like this forever. A poll of this kind shows—as the Bloc Québécois has been saying for years—that there are no longer three options for the Quebec nation to choose from, namely federalism as it currently exists and which is directed against Quebec, renewed federalism, and Quebec sovereignty. Renewed federalism is a grand illusion, in which no one in Quebec believes any more. There are therefore only two options left, either become sovereign and assume all our powers, 100% of our powers, raise 100% of our taxes, and sign 100% of our treaties, or quietly marginalize ourselves within a Canadian nation and under a federal system that is totally unresponsive to Quebec's demands.

It is crystal clear to the Bloc Québécois that the most reasonable, most realistic, most doable option is sovereignty.

Business of Supply

•(1020)

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the House leader of the Bloc Québécois for his eloquent speech, which showed the two visions that exist in Canada. We have the Quebec vision, in which we would receive more powers, and the Canadian vision and the Canadian people, which are not open to the demands of Quebec.

This has been made clear in the actions Parliament has taken in recent years. When the Bloc Québécois asked that Bill 101 be applied to federal areas of jurisdiction, the answer from Ottawa was no. When Quebec wanted to withdraw from Canadian multiculturalism, we got a no from Ottawa. When we wanted the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine to be applied internationally, the answer from Ottawa was no.

Is it not true that the closed vision of the Canadian public has been harmful to Quebec in this Parliament in recent years?

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his very relevant question. It shows how important it is to have a party like the Bloc Québécois here in this House. When public opinion is so unsympathetic to the demands of Quebec, a federalist party will not be the one to speak on behalf of or defend Quebec.

If we were not here, all of the points that the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie brought up would not have been in the debate. They would have been completely ignored.

What has the response of the federal government, the Canadian government, the national government of the Canadian nation, been to the demands of Quebec? We had the sponsorship scandal, which everyone remembers, the Clarity Act, which is an attempt to stifle the democratic will of the people of Quebec, and the pseudo-recognition of the Quebec nation, but nothing ever came out of that, as the member mentioned. The last thing on this list is the desire of most parties in this House to reduce the political weight of Quebec within this federal institution.

The response could be better. Once again, this just makes it very clear that there are just two options left for Quebec: we can become sovereign, which is what we would like, or we can become marginalized and bogged down within a fossilized system.

•(1025)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, I too would like to congratulate the hon. member for Joliette for his presentation on the motion we are debating today. My question for the hon. member is the following.

He was just speaking about the reduction in political weight. This is to say that the governing party, the Conservative party, wants to make sure it has full control over Quebec by reducing its political weight. I would also like to hear his opinion on the reduction of the power Quebec has over economic levers, specifically in regard to the securities commission. We know that the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable, a fawning minion for this government, yesterday argued that the financial authority of the rest of Canada should have priority over that of Quebec. I would like to hear the hon. member's opinion on that.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker. I thank the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas for his question.

I think he demonstrates very well that, both politically and in terms of the instruments and levers of power, Quebec needs much more, but the nation of Canada refuses to think that this is even negotiable.

Every day, the economic future of Quebec is under attack from all the federalist parties. The fiscal imbalance has yet to be resolved and I believe that it is important to point that out. The Conservative government made some transfers a few years ago, but, since then, there have been no further discussions about the so-called federal spending power.

The same goes for the Canada-wide securities commission. There is contempt for this plan in Quebec. Yesterday, we were able to see the coalition that has formed to highlight the negative impact of this idea on Quebec and on several other provinces. We can see that the economic strategy of the nation of Canada rests on two foundations: the tar sands in the west and the financial sector in Toronto. This is a strategy where Quebec has no place.

We will fight on. We can only hope that hon. members from Quebec who belong to other parties will join with us to defend Quebec's economic interests, and, in particular, the interests of Montreal as a financial centre. I would really like to see that.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Madam Speaker, today's Bloc Québécois motion is particularly important to us. It is what we think about the likelihood or the possibility of renewing federalism. We have quite a challenge ahead of us: to prove that sovereignty alone will make Quebec economically viable and allow it to flourish culturally.

Why do we believe that federalism has not been renewed 20 years after the Meech Lake accord? It is because of the actions of the successive governing parties, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party. They immediately reject any National Assembly consensus. A consensus is not reached by sovereignists alone. Federalists are also actively involved in unanimous decisions coming out of the National Assembly on numerous political issues.

First, I want to talk about Quebec's political weight. There is a bill that would add 30 ridings to those represented in Parliament, which means that Quebec's political weight would be reduced. The Constitution allows us to have 75 members. However, when it comes to political weight, 75 members out of 308 is very different from 75 members out of 338. Where are the Quebec members that have been elected to this House? They are working with the members of this Parliament who stand out because of their interest in nation building—building a centralist Canada—and because of their refusal to recognize Quebec's distinct society. The House recognized it, but that was symbolic. Truly recognizing the Quebec nation comes from small, daily political actions.

Business of Supply

Quebec cannot opt out with full compensation, nor can it choose three Supreme Court justices. We want bilingual judges who can hear English and French arguments made by those seeking their support or a ruling. But they come up with bad excuses. For example, the Quebec Conservatives defend their party's position on the grounds that they would not want a francophone judge to be denied the opportunity to sit on the Supreme Court bench. That argument does not hold water. In addition, 71% of Quebecers have said no to reducing Quebec's political weight. Others have weighed in on the possibility of having bilingual judges on the Supreme Court. And Quebec does not have the power to veto constitutional amendments.

Quebec's most pressing and longest-standing demands have been ignored. Quebecers have been marginalized, and the government has refused to limit spending power even though the Conservatives made a campaign promise to do so. Every time we look at the federal government's programs, it is clear that although the government has changed, the way of doing business when it comes to Quebec has not. The Bloc Québécois and sovereignists have to prove that sovereignty is the only way for the Quebec nation to reach its full potential. In many cases, education is the key because some of these issues are complex.

Earlier, my colleagues mentioned securities and how securities management would be transferred to Toronto. Our finance critic can show that this is wrong and would strip Quebec of its economic power. Moreover, a coalition is forming in Quebec to show that this system will hurt Quebec. It is not a sovereignist that said so, but Mr. Bachand, Quebec's finance minister. He said he would mobilize businesspeople to oppose the federal bill to establish a single securities commission, which is about to be introduced in Ottawa. Mr. Bachand feels that the federal bill infringes on provincial jurisdictions and, by centralizing the securities commission in Toronto, threatens the very future of the financial sector in Montreal.

• (1030)

Earlier, I talked about nation building. This is exactly what the Conservatives are doing: building a centralized nation. We have nothing against that, but the government needs to prove to us that this has socio-economic benefits for Quebec. Mr. Bachand said that centralizing the securities commission in Ontario would serve Toronto's interests. All the economic players need to get behind this position and condemn the federal government for being so determined to centralize everything that is done in the other provinces, as the House Leader of the Bloc Québécois said earlier. So securities are coming to Toronto.

The Bloc conducted a survey. Twenty years after the Bloc was created, that is what led to this motion today. The figures speak for themselves. Earlier, my colleague said that there were two visions within Canada, but those two visions lead to two solitudes. Two solitudes, one of which is Quebec, which is still demanding its due. The Conservatives and the Liberals are no different in their approach. One party may be a bit more hypocritical than the other, because it announced that it would recognize the Quebec nation, yet it has done nothing to prove that it really does recognize the Quebec nation. The government's attitude is evident in its securities bill and its position on Quebec's weight in the House, on having Bill 101 apply in institutions under federal jurisdiction and on allowing their

employees to be governed by Bill 101. The government even said no to that, just as it did to harmonizing the GST with the QST. Clearly, it has no desire to take real political action that would partially satisfy Quebec. That shows that this federalism cannot be renewed.

I am really disappointed. I also think it is appalling that some hon. members from Quebec are elected—whether under the banner of the Liberal Party or the Conservative Party—and rise in this House to vote against each Quebec consensus and to vote against the economic growth and the development of Quebec within this federation.

When we were informed about the recognition of Quebec as a nation, we really wanted to believe it. We told ourselves that we were going to witness many concrete actions that would result in Quebec being included in this federation. In fact, it is not a federation, it is federated centralization. That is the opposite of what we think of when we approach the subject of the Canadian federation because Quebec has no say in several of the projects that the federal government wants to see implemented, such as securities.

The Quebec lieutenant, who is from my region, rose in the House to defend that in the name of his government. This morning, the member from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, a riding close to mine, defended the securities commission project. In addition, he has risen in the House to vote against the application of Bill 101 in federal institutions and risen when we talk about reducing Quebec's weight in the House. He is under the impression that Quebec is well served by Canada's so-called federation.

But they do not rise when it is time to vote to support Quebec's forestry sector. They are on their feet to vote \$10 billion budgets for Ontario and peanuts for Quebec. They have announced a grant of \$100 million for one program. That is not what it means to help an ailing industry.

For five years, we have wanted to show the current government and the previous government that something had to be done to save these industries. They could have diversified and explored the means available to help them survive. Cash flow and loan guarantees would have been needed to get through the economic crisis they were thrown into. Once the industries have shut down, it is very difficult to get them up and running again.

This morning, a lot of figures were mentioned. In Quebec, 73% of people said they wanted Quebec to be recognized as a nation, with all the powers that entails and with a special status. To recognize Quebec as a nation, we need concrete actions.

• (1035)

The only possible reading is that federalism is not renewable and that there are two solitudes. We will show that, in fact, nothing is being done to make it beneficial to Quebec.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague made a good speech and I want to ask her a question.

Business of Supply

Her party's motion says that the five clauses of the Meech Lake accord have not been observed. Today, the Bloc Québécois denounces the fact that the accord of 20 years ago is not being respected when, at the time, even the least sovereignists among Quebecers were against it. If the accord in its entirety were proposed today, I guess that the Bloc would support it and that its presence in the House of Commons would not be needed anymore since the five clauses would be implemented. Is this what the motion means? Is the Bloc ready to acknowledge that if the five clauses were accepted, it would not have to be here and that everything would return to normal?

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: The question from the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles is very hypothetical. He could ask the man who was premier of Newfoundland at that time. The question would more appropriately be addressed to him rather than to us. As to the promise of renewed federalism, the Conservative government could have taken some concrete action after it recognized the Quebec nation. Then Quebec would not have to look back to see what the Bloc should have done at that time or should do today. The government could have made some changes to the way it deals with Quebec, for example by passing some Bloc Québécois bills that, according to polls and voting intentions, were strongly supported by the National Assembly and the people of Quebec. It would have then been possible to talk on a different basis. However, given the bad faith in the House, I am a little suspicious about the sincerity of my colleague's question.

• (1040)

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Quebec for her excellent presentation. I made her acquaintance when I was a journalist and she was the member for Québec. Her particular interest was poverty. She had toured Quebec, particularly the rural regions where I worked.

In the early 1990s, after the Meech Lake accord, then prime minister Jean Chrétien and his finance minister, Paul Martin, decided to eliminate the deficit on the backs of the poor and the disadvantaged. Members will remember the cuts in provincial transfers and the pillaging of the employment insurance fund. I would like to know if, in her opinion, there has been any change. Are Quebecers now better served by the federal system than they were at that time? We still wonder about this today. Is Quebec well served by this federation, or would it be better, in order to solve the problem of poverty, among others, for it to control the levers of power and the financial levers?

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. When I met him, he was a journalist and I was touring Quebec regions. I had written a report on the social safety net. I had noted that the social safety net created by a number of federal programs was not enough.

When there is a little bit of money, we create programs and we help a particular group with a specific mission. Then, the federal government decides that it no longer wants to support certain groups for all sorts of reasons. What is happening at present is rather worrisome. They have cut employment insurance. What is the government doing about that? It has not shown the political will to reform employment insurance in any way to help workers who have

lost their jobs. My colleague from Chambly knows about that as he is the Bloc critic for these matters.

I could say a lot more about poverty. The government must take concrete action and not let its citizens down. Increasing the Canada social transfer is one of the first things the federal government should do because it would allow the provinces to better meet community needs. It has not done this. Thus, we are in about the same place as when the Liberal government was in power.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to take the floor to respond to today's arguments by the hon. members of the Bloc, who have been enjoying the immobile comfort of eternal opposition for 20 years now.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Like the federalists.

Hon. Denis Lebel: The Bloc members like to say that federalism does not work and will never work. Indeed, at the end of their congress or meeting last weekend, we were reminded of their prime objective, which they very often forget. It is a pleasure for me today to remind my colleagues of the defeatist and pessimistic attitude that is so typical of these members opposite, who have been wasting the political power of Quebec in Ottawa for 20 years now.

Mr. Daniel Paillé: We never forget it.

Hon. Denis Lebel: We shall speak about securities shortly. One day they take advantage of international opinion, and the next day they reject it. This is what I usually hear in this place. With this pessimistic attitude, the Bloc members aim to stir up people's emotions, to create feelings of anger or spite toward Canadians among citizens of the Quebec nation. It is always the same: Quebec against another province, the good guys against the bad guys, us against them—and their "us" is always very inclusive because they claim to be the only ones representing Quebecers.

I come from a region where nationalism is very much a factor. I am very proud to be a nationalist. Indeed I was introduced as such by the Prime Minister when I entered this the House, and I will take no lessons in nationalism from anyone among the hon. members opposite. I am here for Quebec, for the regions of Quebec, and to stand up for what Quebec is. I do this while respecting the ideas of others. When others do not agree with me, I do not say that they are servile, that they are doormats, or anything like that. I enjoy debating respectful ideas that will move Canadian society forward. That is the choice I have made.

Today is forestry day in Quebec, when the use of wood has been officially recognized in Quebec, and we shall continue to work on economic files in all the regions of Quebec, and it is a pleasure for me to do so.

My Conservative colleagues and I are realists, people of action and vision, people who create results for Quebec. Of course, it is easier to carry the message when you have no objective and you do not have to manage the portfolio. We assume the difficult job of managing and directing to the best of our competence. If we had 49 members from Quebec in the government, the voice of Quebec would be that much stronger, I grant you that.

Business of Supply

I hope that one day, to manage the country, my beautiful province will elect 40 or 50 representatives from the governing party, so that we can have even more influence. Obviously, Quebec needs an even stronger voice, and it is not by shouting from the bleachers and criticizing decisions that we will acquire it. I would prefer to sit down at the table where the decisions are made, so we can move things ahead.

Even when we recognized the Quebec nation, those people stood up and proclaimed it was a black day for Quebec. It had to be so. Whether it is a decision such as the decision to recognize the Quebec nation or the economic decisions we are making today, the members opposite vote against every element of Canada's economic action plan, which has just proven its worth. Indeed, we are not wearing rose-coloured glasses when we say that the economy is recovering, gently and gradually. The battle has not yet been won. But we must work on the economy and on jobs, and we must build our children's future. In my opinion, our children's future is built by pooling our strengths, not by scattering them.

How sad it must be to always look for the negative side of things to get people worked up. Maybe it is easier, but personally I think it must be very hard to do every day. They are so short on arguments for their plan to separate that they have to resort to negative arguments like, "federalism is not working".

On the weekend, an article by Dominique La Haye appeared in the *Journal de Québec* proclaiming: "Long live a sovereign Quebec!" That is the essence of what they want to represent here. So why do they bother meddling in the governance of this country every day and talk about defending prisoners who often attack our armed forces, instead of defending our armed forces?

Mr. André Bellavance: It is so ridiculous.

Hon. Denis Lebel: Why do they attack all kinds of things that have nothing to do with their *raison d'être*? They are here for one reason and one reason alone: to destroy the very country that I want to serve.

How sad it must also be to fail to achieve any concrete results for the people of Quebec, who really need representatives who support them and help create jobs in their regions.

Twenty years ago, the Conservative government, which was open to Quebec, had a commendable goal with the Meech Lake accord.

I prefer people who are optimistic and who take action, over people who sit on the sidelines in lounge chairs to watch the parade go by and provide the commentary, saying this is wrong and that is not right, that we are making too much noise, and that we are doormats. That is very easy to do. So it was 20 years ago, which also coincides with the arrival in Ottawa of the Bloc, a party that is daily doing everything it can to destroy our country.

•(1045)

Generally at age 20, we take stock of that first part of our lives. We wonder what we will do in the coming years once we have grown up. We wonder what we could do differently to improve ourselves. It is important to take stock of what the Bloc has done for Quebecers, the concrete actions it has taken and the results it has to show for those actions.

At the founding convention of the party, Lucien Bouchard said that the success of the Bloc would be measured by the brevity of its existence. He later added that the shorter their stay, the more successful their mission. That is what the Bloc's founder said.

The former Parti Québécois leader, Jacques Parizeau, said in 1993 that the more effective Bloc MPs are, the less time they will have to spend in Ottawa. In the same vein, the current Bloc leader said the following on the night he was elected in 1990:

It felt strange when I entered Parliament. I thought to myself, I must be the first person to enter this chamber hoping to leave as soon as possible.

In 1994, he added that no one elected in the Bloc wants to make a career out of it. On the eve of the 1997 election, he promised Quebecers that if they elected the Bloc, it would not be for long.

The last time I checked, the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie is still the leader of the Bloc. He has been in the House of Commons for 20 years now.

Two decades have gone by and the Bloc is still here. I am sure the brevity of existence to which Mr. Bouchard alluded was not meant to be measured in decades. The arrival of the Bloc may have had merit in 1990. In 1990, the TV series *Les filles de Caleb* had just debuted and the captain of the Montreal Canadiens was Guy Carbonneau. In 2010, the Canadiens are still in the playoffs and the Bloc is still clinging to the idea that they were not going to be here for long, but they are still here.

In 20 years, Quebec has changed and grown, but the Bloc has not. Despite the fact that 63% of Quebecers voted for a federalist party in the last election, the Bloc members believe that their outdated option of separating Quebec from Canada is still alive. Their leader can continue to dig in his heels, but that is of no help to Quebec.

Quebec's political power will not increase with more spectators, but with more MPs who can one day aspire to sit at the table where decisions are made.

I understand that the opposition has a role to play and that it is necessary, but still it must be constructive and work to build the country it claims to have been elected to defend, not to tear it down.

In fact, the Bloc has produced nothing for Quebecers since it has held the majority of seats in Quebec. What is it doing with that majority? It has not achieved one promise, not one project. I challenge any Bloc member to rise in the House and tell us seriously, with a straight face, about a single project, a single job that has been created as a result of their work. Not only does the Bloc not deliver anything, but, and even worse, it does not prevent anything.

The fiscal imbalance started when there was a Bloc majority in Ottawa. That majority did not prevent the Liberals from robbing Canadians in the biggest political scandal in the history of Canada. We are still looking for the millions of dollars that were paid out on the backs of taxpayers. Nor did the Bloc prevent the Liberals from increasing greenhouse gas emissions by 33% above the Kyoto targets. It did not prevent the Liberals from infringing on provincial powers. Not only can the Bloc not achieve anything, it cannot prevent anything.

Business of Supply

In September 2009, even the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin said, speaking of a Bloc member, that “everybody knows he cannot deliver”.

The Bloc members are not patting themselves on the back for having only four bills passed in the last 20 years. Four bills out of 272 that have received royal assent: three to change the names of electoral districts and one to create a commemorative holiday. During that time, in the ridings, we hear that they will be arguing for bills. Every election, they bring forth a list of bills and tell people they are going to get them passed and fix things. But in fact, after 20 years, it comes to four bills, three of which were to change the names of electoral districts, and one to create a commemorative holiday.

Nor are they patting themselves on the back for failing to keep the thousand promises they made during election campaigns and for getting over 40 people pensioned off from a system they want to destroy. In a nutshell, the only jobs the Bloc has succeeded in creating are their own.

The Bloc has become a true concrete block that is holding Quebec down, misinforming the public and looking for a fight at any cost. My colleagues opposite are the undefeated champions of whining. When we state our opinion, we are treated like less than nothing, as the many comments I hear every day attest.

● (1050)

Every day, we are reminded that they have been democratically elected. We have been too. If they want respect, I really think we should get some back.

They play armchair quarterback and are content to criticize, but to score goals, you have to get on the ice. By working together, we, the Conservatives members from Quebec, are promoting the interests of the Quebec nation in a united Canada. We have done more in four years than the Bloc has done in 20 years and than it will ever do. The Bloc offers sterile words and arguments. We offer results, and I am very sure we will continue to do that.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when our colleague from Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean began his speech and said it was important, I thought he was going to apologize because, since he has been here, he has done nothing for the forest industry in Quebec even though it is his responsibility. I do not know whether he is aware of the image he was projecting when he was on his feet earlier and we could see behind him a large number of Ontario MPs who did their job and delivered \$20 billion to the automobile industry. He could not even manage to deliver \$200 million to the forest industry. All the while, he was making a speech to discredit Quebec, to the great satisfaction of the members behind him. They have the right to make choices, to defend the interests of their economic regions, but he did not have enough backbone to defend the interests of his own economic region.

I would like to hear what he has to say on one point. He said that we are not stepping on the ice. Since he has stepped on the ice, what has he done for the French language? He voted against it. What has he done for the forest industry? He has done nothing. What has he done to maintain Quebec's political and economic weight? Not only has he not done anything, but he is constantly voting against Quebec's economic and political interests.

● (1055)

Hon. Denis Lebel: Madam Speaker, this is a concrete example of the traditional and usual misinformation. It is all about politicizing and misinforming. The forestry issue has been turned into a political issue with the usual partners. Throughout this country, everybody knows the forestry issue is economic and not political. It will be turned into a governmental issue. Think about it. We are selling five times less lumber to our main economic partners, the Americans, because they are building less housing with lumber. Quebec exports 50% of its lumber, and 96% of these exports are going to the U.S. That country used to have over two million housing starts annually, but that number dropped to under 500,000 last year. You can make all sorts of political noise and talk to the media, but the truth is it is an economic issue.

In Quebec alone last year, this government announced \$200 million for forest management and silviculture in order to prepare our forests for the future. That gave jobs to 8,000 forestry workers. Two weeks ago, we announced a \$100 million commitment for forest communities in order to help diversify their economy for development projects. These commitments for a total of \$300 million, from our department alone, are something the Bloc never managed in 20 years.

As to the automobile issues, Canada, the United States and Ontario signed an agreement in order to support an industry where all jobs would have been transferred to the U.S. At the request of the provinces and the forest industry, we signed an agreement with the Americans on the lumber trade. From 2000 to 2006, companies were paying countervailing duties of 30%. Thanks to the new agreement, duties have been lowered to 5% to 15%, depending on the choice made by the provinces. We have a signed agreement. Once again, that party is spreading false information and turning the issues into political ones.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): For hon. members who appear to have questions, I am trying to allow the same length of time for the answer as for the question. In the last case, that was two minutes for the question and two minutes for the answer.

So, questions and comments. The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine has the floor.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, perhaps the Conservative member's answer seemed long because it was so inadequate. I have a question for him. He claims to be defending the interests of all Quebecers. What did he say to his colleague, the Minister of the Environment, who demolished Quebec's proactive plan to fight climate change in a speech he gave in Calgary in February 2010? Does he recall the remarks that his colleague made in public? Did he speak in public in support of Quebec's proactive plan?

How is it that the Conservatives, who claim to have the interests of all Quebecers at heart in the economic action plan in their own budget, have no proposals for seniors, veterans, culture or any other matter that Quebecers and all other Canadians see as important?

Business of Supply

It is now a year since the Conservative government has been talking about reforming pensions, but not one concrete initiative was announced in the budget. There is not one cent to help people in difficulty. We are witnessing company closures in the forestry sector and in other sectors in Quebec, but there is not one penny for that.

• (1100)

Hon. Denis Lebel: Madam Speaker, my colleague, the Minister of the Environment, is proposing an approach with more specific targets. We will take action, as we have done since we arrived in 2006, unlike the ex-government party opposite, who, for 13 years, let greenhouse gas emissions increase by more than 30%. They did nothing. They signed agreements, but they did not follow through. We are going to continue to improve our targets and to work for the environment. Sustainable development really is one of our priorities.

I applaud the initiative of the Minister of Finance who, with his parliamentary secretary, continues to tour the country to listen to arguments and refine the jurisdictional details for pension funds.

It is important to remember that 90% of the country's pension funds are under provincial jurisdiction. Above all, we must not hurt businesses with our actions. People say that a company's pensioners must be put ahead of bank creditors, but we have to understand that, if the banks no longer lend money to those companies, they may well go into bankruptcy.

Studies are being done at the moment. We really have to see how the financial analysis—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I am sorry to interrupt the member. Order, please.

The hon. member for Portage—Lisgar.

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday I had the opportunity to travel with other members of a committee I sit on to Lac-Simon, a first nations community located in Quebec.

The chief and council specifically thanked the government and the minister for the work that has been done through Canada's economic action plan. They specifically thanked us for the funds that we have provided and they mentioned the hon. minister by name. That is not a riding that we represent, but we are working on behalf of Quebecers. They would not have a voice if it were not for the minister. They also said that the long gun registry really is affecting their first nations community.

I wonder if the minister could comment on these two issues.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Lebel: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

In the month of April, 108,000 jobs were created in Canada. We are on the way back to a stronger economy, which will allow our young people to have a future. They want jobs. We will continue to work to create jobs in all the regions of Quebec. I was happy to hear my colleague's comment, because in all the regions—Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Gaspé and Îles de la Madeleine, the North Shore, where I will be again next week—we are trying to help the whole

community, including first nations who are going through difficult times with a population explosion.

I will add one more thing, in response to my colleague, on the long gun registry. In the eyes of those who live in large urban centres, the long gun registry is one thing. But it is a totally different thing in the eyes of those who live in all the regions of Quebec. I was saying the other day that hunters' associations throughout Quebec speak to me about this issue when I am in the regions and ask that we abolish the long gun registry. That is a fact. What my colleague just reported from the aboriginal affairs committee is not a unique or isolated occurrence. It is true in rural areas throughout Quebec. Obviously .410s, .22s and 12 gauge shotguns used for duck hunting are mostly found in rural areas of the province and the country, not in large urban centres. That is why people who live in rural areas, be they hunters, farmers or first nations, are the ones asking us to abolish the registry.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas rising on a point of order?

Mr. Yves Lessard: Madam Speaker, you can let me know whether my comments are out of order. My colleague probably forgot that I went with her yesterday to Lac-Simon. But what she is saying here does not accurately reflect what came out in Lac-Simon.

• (1105)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I thank the hon. member, but I think his comments would be better suited for the debate.

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I would like the chance to respond because the member was given a chance.

Actually, that is exactly what the member of that first nations said. He specifically said, "I want to thank the Government of Canada for the economic action plan and for what it has provided for us in terms of housing". Then he mentioned the hon. member by name.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I thank the hon. members. I think I have heard enough. It really is not a point of order; it is more a question of debate.

[*Translation*]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Westmount-Ville-Marie.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will share my time with the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

I would like to start by rereading the motion presented by the member for Joliette. It states:

That this House acknowledge that federalism cannot be renewed, since 20 years after the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, Quebec still does not have the power to choose three justices on the Supreme Court of Canada, or to opt out with compensation from federal programs in its areas of jurisdiction, nor does it have a real veto over constitutional amendments and its status as a nation still has not been recognized in the Canadian Constitution.

That is what the motion says.

Business of Supply

I have no doubt that the Bloc member was sincere in presenting this motion. I want to make something clear, however. The member wants Quebec to become independent, but he wants all the advantages that come from being part of the Canadian federation. In other words, the member wants to have his cake and eat it too.

Over the past 20 years, the Bloc consistently rejected Meech or any improvement to federalism. Some Bloc Québécois members have been here ever since their party's inception. Even now, 20 years later, they are bent on working against anything that would improve how federalism works. The fact is that federalism is a system that can evolve and, with a minimum of good faith on the part of everyone, it can improve. But my colleagues from the Bloc have no interest in that, hence my criticism. Instead of being constructive, they want to destroy. Instead of contributing, they want to withdraw. Separation is their goal. That would mean zero senator, zero member of Parliament and zero minister in Ottawa. It would also mean zero judge from Quebec at the Supreme Court. It would mean zero dollar in equalization. Frankly, it is sheer hypocrisy to feign ripping up his shirt now.

Equalization is constitutionally guaranteed and it has allowed Quebec to receive tens of billions of dollars during the past 20 years, which is no small contribution to the province's budget. On the subject of separation, both sides of the issue have to be presented, and the truth has to be spoken. They cannot have their cake and eat it too. Every speech from the Bloc since its arrival here has contained demands. All we have been hearing are complaints about injustice and inequity. We have not heard a word about the great benefits Quebec is drawing from the Canadian federation. Not a word either about the efforts made by the Canadian federation to accommodate Quebec by recognizing its uniqueness. No, for the Bloc Québécois, there is only injustice and inequity.

My party, the Liberal Party, shares Quebec's values of mutual help. That is why, for example, Paul Martin entered into an asymmetrical agreement on health care with Quebec. My party, the Liberal Party of Canada, also shares Quebec's view of the environment. We agree that 1990 should be the reference year for greenhouse gas reduction targets. My party recognizes the need to invest like never before in green technologies. In that regard, we are seeing eye to eye with Quebec.

But the Bloc keeps working to divide instead of unite. The Bloc wants to tear down instead of build. The Bloc is refusing to work together in good faith towards a solution that would be acceptable to all of the provinces, including Quebec, thus building a stronger, more united country.

My party, the Liberal Party of Canada, shares Quebec's cultural values. My party is committed to doubling the funding for the Canada Council for the Arts, which would be of great benefit to Quebec.

• (1110)

My party is committed to restoring programs that have been eliminated by the Conservatives and that would share Quebec's culture with the world. My party has committed to ensuring stable, long-term funding for CBC/Radio-Canada because it truly recognizes the essential role that this institution plays in the preservation and growth of Quebec's language and culture.

My party, the Liberal Party of Canada, recognizes the importance of preserving the vitality of Quebec's regions. We know that our beloved Quebec is not only defined by its cities, but also by its rural communities. That is why my party wants to work with Quebec to ensure that development is province-wide.

That is why we have committed to maintaining and increasing the vitality of Quebec's rural regions through the following: a forestry sector strategy that will revitalize the sector and allow us to benefit from increased processing of raw materials and from research and development; a national food strategy, which would have a major impact on our agriculture producers; a commitment to encourage more doctors and nurses to move to the regions; a refundable tax credit for volunteer firefighters in the regions in recognition of their important contribution to rural infrastructure; a commitment to broadband Internet access for all regions in Quebec and in other provinces; and a moratorium on the closure of rural post offices in recognition of the need to offer the same services to all citizens, whether they live in cities or rural communities.

Although few Quebecers realize it, there is a major federal presence in Quebec with respect to science and research. I know this from personal experience because I had the honour and privilege of serving as president of the Canadian Space Agency for several years. I know that Quebecers are proud of the agency. Based in Saint-Hubert, the agency is helping to create a world-class aerospace cluster in Quebec.

We all know that the Canadian Space Agency and more than a dozen other Quebec-based federal research and development institutions, including Natural Resources, Fisheries and Oceans, Agriculture and Agri-food, the NRC and others, would have to shut down in the event of separation. The Bloc never talks about those significant consequences, but Quebecers are aware of them and do not want to lose these important assets.

My party shares Quebec's values in terms of culture, regional economic development, health care and freedom of association. My party wants to work with Quebec because it believes in a convergence federalism with federal and provincial jurisdiction and shared responsibilities. This kind of federalism is possible, and we invite Quebecers to join us in creating the kind of Canada that reflects who they are. Our vision is very different from the Bloc's, which is all about separation, destruction and isolation.

It is time for the Bloc to face the facts. After 20 years, the Bloc needs to think about whether it is still relevant. Its founder, Lucien Bouchard, has raised this issue openly and publicly in the past few months. Lucien Bouchard understands that Quebec is no longer headed for separation, independence and the destruction of our country. Yes, Quebec has demands, but that is normal. All of the provinces have demands. We can work on these issues in a federalist structure. Quebec can develop within Canada with its language and culture, its vibrant rural regions and an environment in which air and water quality meet its standards. It can work with Canada to achieve that.

Business of Supply

• (1115)

As I said at the beginning, I do not doubt my Bloc colleagues' sincerity. They have their vision of the future and are focusing their efforts on making that dream come true. At the same time, I want to tell them that in life, it is better to work together, to share one vision, to try to accommodate one another and get along. That is what the majority of Quebecers want.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am somewhat disappointed in the speech made by the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, who is frankly playing the bogeyman today. I listened to his proposition, and the problem is with his basic assumption. He says that federalism, as a system, can evolve as long as there is the will. That is what the member just told us, and that is where the problem lies. Federalism has not evolved since 1982, since his government unilaterally patriated the Constitution, since the Meech Lake accord was deep-sixed. There has been no evolution in Canadian federalism because there has been no desire to see it evolve, as the member just said.

This became abundantly clear over the weekend. Both the Canadian population and our colleagues in this House criticize us, as the member did, for speaking only on behalf of Quebec. We are not ashamed of that. I see the member is nodding. Yes, he said that. Let me say one thing: we are not ashamed of defending Quebec's interests, because that is our role.

How can the member say that the federal system can evolve if there is a will, when there has never been any political will whatsoever, neither in the House nor among the Canadian public?

Mr. Marc Garneau: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comment. I find it regrettable that, after so many years, the Bloc is at a standstill. The Bloc plays the same record over and over again, and its members must get tired of it from time to time because they cannot stop complaining. The Bloc refuses to see that Canada has evolved over the last 20 years. My colleague might not exactly be pleased with the way things have changed, but there has been an evolution nonetheless. However, 20 years later, the vast majority of Quebecers recognize that this is something that must be pursued if we want federalism to thrive.

My colleague from the Bloc, sadly, strives to attain something that is less and less relevant, but he does not seem to realize it.

[English]

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie for his comments.

There is an article in the May edition of the periodical, *Policy Options*, from which I am going to read a brief quote on this subject. It talks about Quebec separation:

In the spring of 2010 it does seem almost like an afterthought, not a centrepiece. The Bloc Québécois Leader...on the verge of retirement, has completed a curious tour of English Canada explaining how much he loves Canada. That his enthusiasm to divide Canada is simply a product of his greater love for Quebec, is his pretzel logic. Bloc founder Lucien Bouchard publicly flails his former colleagues and declares that there is no prospect of a separate Quebec in the foreseeable future. Parti Québécois Leader Pauline Marois may be competitive in Quebec provincial politics, but her increasingly desperate defence of the separatist vision appears to flirt dangerously with racial/religious identity.

I wonder if the member has any thoughts on that passage.

• (1120)

Mr. Marc Garneau: Madam Speaker, my interpretation of the situation with respect to the leader of the Bloc's tour of the country is that the Bloc is in a very painful situation. It has been 20 years since it began its quest. I do not doubt its members' sincerity and hard work in trying to achieve that quest, but it is a painful situation in which they find themselves. On the one hand, they would like to celebrate being around for 20 years and on the other hand, they would like to not celebrate being around for 20 years.

I believe that the leader of the Bloc is at loose ends as to finding a new strategy to make the quest of the Bloc relevant. He fell upon the idea of doing a tour of the country, perhaps hoping this might revive emotions in Quebec. However, the reality is that Quebecers have moved on to other things. I think the leader is getting tired. I think he would like to do other things, perhaps provincially, but the door is not open to him there either.

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to participate in this debate on the Bloc motion and I will say at the outset that I fully support the Liberal Party position, specifically, that we cannot support the Bloc motion.

Yesterday I read an article in the local news section of *Le Devoir* by columnist Chantal Hébert. The article was in the Monday, May 10, 2010, edition on page A3, under the headline, *Meech, 20 years later*.

I think it would be very interesting for all members of this House, especially those who do not usually read *Le Devoir* newspaper, to read that article.

I intend to read it and I hope to be able to read the entire article, because I think she raises some important points. In it she says:

The leaders of the Quebec sovereignist movement judged the Meech Lake accords negotiated 23 years ago very harshly. According to them, by accepting those provisions, Quebec was negotiating its future on the cheap in a framework that was dangerously simplistic for its national aspirations.

I apologize, but I have to read with a magnifying glass, because I have poor eyesight.

During the three years of animated debate the accord set in motion, their opposition never flagged. The day the Meech proposal died, the sovereignist leaders heaved a collective sigh of relief.

At the time, few of them predicted that the idea of a Canadian solution to the issue of Quebec's political status would still be as tenacious two decades later. Against all odds, it continues to be significantly more unifying that the prospect of a sovereign Quebec.

Twenty years after the death of Meech, there is still a consensus in Quebec on its main provisions. According to a poll conducted for the Bloc Québécois and the *Intellectuels pour la souveraineté*, four out of five Quebecers support entrenching Quebec's status as a nation in the Constitution. The rest of the poll results run along the same lines. But the Canadian blockage that led to the 1990 constitutional crisis is just as intact.

This blockage was the focus of much attention from sovereignist supporters who gathered around the tomb of Meech this past weekend to exorcise the ghost of a Canadian arrangement between Quebec and the rest of the federation. Nevertheless, it is not the newest or, from the sovereignist standpoint, the most disturbing aspect of the current relationship between Quebec and Canada.

Business of Supply

The rift that scuppered the Meech proposal and, later, the Charlottetown proposal served as the backdrop for the 1995 referendum. In addition, the Bloc Québécois has just marked 20 years of calling attention to its existence from atop its very visible federal platform. Yet interest in a Canadian solution to the issue of Quebec's political status is not waning, whereas support for sovereignty is stalling.

In fact, in the 20 years since the failure of Meech, the connection between support for sovereignty and the state of Canada-Quebec relations has grown weaker. Strained relations between Quebec and the ROC [rest of Canada] are fuelling the sovereignty cause less and less.

In the most recent federal election, the debate over culture, an issue that speaks to Quebec's identity if ever there was one, did not enable the Bloc Québécois to go over the 40% mark. The Bloc's 2008 score against the [then leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville] and the [Conservative leader, who is now Prime Minister] differs by only two tenths of a percentage point from the results the [Bloc leader, the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie] achieved after the clumsy campaign he waged as a neophyte leader in 1997.

● (1125)

In the past, sovereignist sentiment was generally at its highest when federalist governments were in power in Quebec. Today, however, the prevailing unpopularity of the Charest government and its indecision in matters of identity and language have no great consequential effect on sovereignty.

Twenty years after Meech Lake, the majority of Quebecers, for whom the bar, albeit low, was set sufficiently high to justify their allegiance to Canada, seem less and less inclined to equate their grievances with Canada with their desire for sovereignty.

That is very significant.

The sponsors of the poll that stimulated debate on sovereignty this weekend were careful to avoid asking respondents where they ranked constitutional reform on their lists of priorities. It would have been interesting to see what percentage of Quebecers would have placed an active search for new constitutional arrangements ahead of the economy, health, education or the environment.

Given the lack of pressure on the current premiers in Canada and Quebec about this issue, it is reasonable to suppose that Quebecers are in no more of a hurry to see their federalist leaders advance to the constitutional front again than they are to see their sovereignist leaders sound anew the call for a referendum debate.

In a weekend speech, the Bloc leader stated that Quebecers who still believe in a Canada renewed along the lines they would like to see are deluding themselves. But, compared with their counterparts in the ROC, they are dreaming with their eyes wide open.

In the rest of Canada, people are more and more concerned about dysfunctional federal institutions and are wondering about the role of the Bloc Québécois in the succession of minority governments in Ottawa. But the circumstances that gave birth to the Bloc are largely absent from the prevailing official discourse and eyes are closed to the obvious fact that Canada in the 21st century will be continuing to work with institutions designed in the 19th century as long as there is no political will to normalize relations with Quebec.

This column is very significant, first, because Ms. Hébert very clearly shows that sovereignty is not at all a priority for a large majority of Quebecers and, second, that four out of five Quebecers would like to see Quebec included in the Constitution to which it is already legally linked. This shows that Quebecers want to stay in Canada. They want to do their share as part of Canada. They want to influence Canada. I would really like the members of the Bloc, for whom I have a lot of respect and with whom I have had the pleasure to work in the 13 years I have been here, to use their creativity and their innovative ideas so that we can take a look at our federal institutions to ensure that they serve us well in the 21st century and so that Quebec can grow and develop as it should in Canada.

● (1130)

Let me end by saying that I do not support the Bloc Québécois motion. I think that these are ideas from the past and that Quebecers—and I include myself among—and all other Canadians are facing greater challenges.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech, which was not fear-tinged like that of the member who spoke before her, the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, who reminded me a little of Jean Chrétien, only the language was more refined. He said Quebec would be losing several institutions if it became sovereign, a country of its own among other nations in the world. Quite honestly, this is not the kind of thing we should be hearing in 2010.

Could the hon. member give us an example of renewed federalism? During the seminar she spoke about, over the weekend, polls told us that the overwhelming majority of Canadians outside Quebec do not want to renew in any way the federalism that is embodied in the Constitution so that Quebec could have a place in this federal system. This is not what the rest of Canada wants.

I respect the choice made by my colleague to remain a part of Canada. And I have the utmost respect for people in Quebec who believe Quebec should be a country in its own right.

Are my colleague and her party supporting the establishment of a single securities commission in Canada? Her party is debating the issue, and I would like to know her opinion.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Madam Speaker, I thank the Bloc Québécois member for his question.

First, as regards the poll sponsored by the Bloc Québécois, the overwhelming majority of Canadians living outside Quebec said they were not interested in new negotiations on a constitutional amendment, unlike 80% of Quebecers, who would like a constitutional amendment allowing Quebec to ratify the 1982 Constitution. Here again, it is all about priorities.

As Chantal Hébert mentioned in her column, which I just read in its entirety, the poll did not ask Quebecers where a constitutional amendment fits in their priorities. The answer obtained in the rest of Canada is not, in my opinion, a rejection of Quebec and its importance within Canada. Rather, I think it has more to do with a degree of weariness and the fact that people have other priorities right now. That is how this answer should be interpreted.

● (1135)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Madam Speaker, in her speech, the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine forgot to mention that support for Quebec sovereignty at the height of the sponsorship scandal reached levels that had not been seen since referendum night, on October 30, 1995. Instead of reforming the Canadian federation after the dismal outcome of that referendum for Quebec federalists, the Liberals decided to create the dark sponsorship program, which only succeeded in tarnishing Quebecers' reputation outside the province.

Moreover, the nice rhetoric used by the member opposite does not change anything to the fact that there is \$40 million of Canadian taxpayers' hard-earned money still missing.

My question is: where are those \$40 million? Canadians are still waiting for answers.

Business of Supply

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Madam Speaker, instead of uttering lies, the Conservative member should read justice Gomery's report in its entirety, and also the report of the Auditor General of Canada on the sponsorship program. She will see that what the so-called analysts and politicians of his party are saying is not true. End of story.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Speaker, so that people following our debate can understand what it is all about, we are discussing a Bloc motion aimed at establishing that there is no use trying to do better in Canada. It is hardly surprising that the New Democratic Party, devoted as it is to establishing winning conditions for Canada in Quebec and winning conditions for Quebec in Canada, does not share this rather sad, dispirited point of view.

I will read the Bloc motion all the same and people can see that it starts with the conclusion and finishes with the premise. This is very telling when it comes to the mindset of the Conservatives and the Bloc members because the conclusions are determined in advance.

The Bloc Québécois has decided that Canada is not worth the effort while the Conservatives do all they can to destroy Quebec's place in Canada. Look at the conclusion at the beginning of the Bloc motion. "That this House acknowledge that federalism cannot be renewed—" This is their conclusion. The Bloc then proceeds to a false premise, saying in effect that no constitutional offer that would meet Quebec's traditional demands has ever come or will ever come from a federal government of any kind.

It is quite a feat to predict this. The Bloc members here in the House, in the month of May 2010, are able to gaze into their crystal ball with all the prowess of a Nostradamus and announce that forever more, over centuries and centuries, no government will be able to meet their demands.

There is something about this. When I read the motion, I really wonder what it does to help Quebec—and this from a party that claims to be here in order to advance Quebec's interests. The last time the Bloc introduced a motion, it was constructive and positive. It aimed at something that could help Quebec. Its purpose was to maintain Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons, the most important legislative body in Canada. We had no problem supporting the Bloc on this. All my colleagues, including those from British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario, joined to support it.

The reason why they supported the motion is they knew that two things need to be done to rebalance our democratic system. There has been a major increase in the population of some other provinces and representation by population is a basic democratic principle. We therefore had no problem substantially increasing the number of seats in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario in particular.

Nonetheless, if we are sincere about Quebecers forming a nation within a united Canada, that has to actually mean something. And here the NDP, as a resolutely federalist party, believes that Canada is worth the trouble and that Canada is better off with Quebec and Quebec is better off with Canada. That is what we believe and that is what we will work toward. That is the very meaning of the Sherbrooke declaration proposed by the leader of the New Democratic Party, who is the first leader of the NDP born in Quebec. He understands the pressing need for this fundamental recognition of Quebec.

The Bloc's motion refers to an event that occurred 20 years ago, namely the Meech Lake accord. To hear them today and to read their motion, an observer from another country who might be watching the debate today from the gallery would think that the Meech Lake accord was of interest to the Bloc Québécois. He would think that the Bloc Québécois and the sovereignists were in favour of the Meech Lake accord the way they are lamenting it today.

I refer to what my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie said earlier. He said that the accord had been deep-sixed. That is his term and not mine. They are lamenting the death of the Meech Lake accord. The little problem with the logic of the Bloc Québécois is that they fought tooth and nail against the Meech Lake accord, the same accord they are lamenting today. They got the result they wanted, namely the death of the Meech Lake accord.

● (1140)

That is one little problem of logic inherent in the Bloc Québécois' analysis, but that is not all. Soon afterward, we saw another attempt to reform the Constitution, which was called the Charlottetown Accord. As one, the entire sovereignist movement attacked the Charlottetown Accord.

I referred earlier to an attempt made recently in good faith by the Bloc to freeze the number of Quebec's seats in the House to at least its current weight, which is 24.35% of the seats. The Charlottetown Accord would have given us 25%. The Bloc was against that. Now they are trying to hold on to 24.35%.

The big loser in the revision of the number of seats proposed by the Conservatives is Quebec. Quebec is the only province in Canada, and let us be clear on that, the only one, which with this change sees its demographic weight fall beneath its representation by population. It is the only loser from the Conservatives' actions in this whole manoeuvre.

The Bloc still has a problem with logic and consistency. Having fought against the recognition of Quebec and its 25%, what did it have left as an argument? It does not even want Quebec to stay within Canada, but it is pleading for better representation. That is a contradiction inherent in its logic, insurmountable on every level.

I remember when a former prime minister, who unfortunately had other difficulties in life—we should be getting the Oliphant Commission decision soon—had an idea that he expressed in these infamous words. He said that he wanted to bring Quebec back into the Constitution with honour and enthusiasm. He worked tirelessly towards that goal.

Just now, I was listening carefully to the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. I am sure that it was an inadvertent error, but she said something in her presentation that did not correspond with the truth. She said that a poll yesterday showed that four out of five Quebecers wanted Quebec to be brought back into the Constitution. That is incorrect. The poll showed that four out of five Quebecers want the recognition of Quebec as a nation to be enshrined in the Constitution.

Business of Supply

That is what the New Democratic Party wants. Our party wants the recognition to be real and to be enshrined in the Constitution of Canada. Then we would avoid the sad spectacle of the Conservatives taking away Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons. We would avoid the sad spectacle of the Conservatives and their token Quebeckers lining up to vote against bilingual judges.

It is as if being bilingual makes one less competent to sit on the Supreme Court. The Official Languages Act was passed in 1968, that is more than forty years ago. Anyone aspiring to a Supreme Court nomination today was in law school after the Official Languages Act was passed and understands the importance of knowing both languages.

I was the speaker of a student parliament at Queen's University, one of Canada's great universities. I was a little surprised to hear so little French in the debates from the three hundred or so students who were there. I chatted with the students after my session as speaker and I simply asked how many of them had been in immersion for all or part of their studies. I was not surprised to find that two thirds—200 out of 300, that is, because it is a good school that attracts good candidates—had been in immersion. I winked at them and said in English: “If you don't use it, you'll lose it.” If they did not practice their French, they were going to lose it.

The message the Conservatives and their token Quebeckers are sending—they should be ashamed to vote against their own language—to any brilliant young law student in the rest of Canada is that he should not bother going to Laval University for a summer session to improve his French, nor should he take a course, as did Brian Dickson, former chief justice who, late in life, made it his mission to learn French. The message the Conservatives and their pitiful token Quebeckers are sending is, “Do not even bother”.

• (1145)

[English]

“French does not matter in this country. It will never mean anything for you anywhere in your political or professional life. You can go to law school in Canada. You will never learn a single word of French. You will never practise French and you can go to the highest court in the land, even if you do not understand a single word that is being said to you in French”.

[Translation]

I remember seeing a now infamous recording of chief justice McLachlin asking a francophone lawyer who was pleading before the Supreme Court:

[English]

“Could you please slow down. Judge Rothstein can't follow you with the translators”.

[Translation]

Knowing that the time available to lawyers before the Supreme Court is subject to very strict rules, it is not really surprising that Quebec's best litigators have no choice but to use English before the Supreme Court so as not to be penalized. That is where we are now with the Conservative government and its token Quebeckers who have the gall to say that they recognize Quebec as a nation but who,

through all their actions, are doing everything they can to undermine this reality.

This motion marks the anniversary of the Meech Lake accord but, just recently, we celebrated the anniversary of another infamous event, the Brinks affair. For those who do not remember, it was a media event staged by the Quebec Liberals, the cousins of the federal Liberals. They used Brinks trucks to transport security certificates to the other side of the border, in Ontario. Now they do not even have to make an effort because the Conservatives are in cahoots with the Liberals to get the whole securities industry out of Quebec. Thousands of brilliant students and graduates from Quebec who are now able to work in this area in Quebec will have to leave if the plan orchestrated by the Conservatives and Dalton McGuinty becomes reality.

The bright and talented Dalton McGuinty—the one who is in the news today—is comparing Toronto's banking sector to Wayne Gretzky. It seems to me, but this is just an opinion, that the premier, with its base in Toronto, is not in a position to talk about hockey with the rest of Canada, but this is just friendly advice to him on my part.

Whenever we talk about Quebec, the Conservatives are opposed to any real recognition. Whenever it matters, the Liberals side with the Conservatives against Quebec. Earlier, I alluded to the number of seats in the House of Commons. The Liberals and the Conservatives form a united front. They get together to oppose a true recognition of the importance of giving, preserving and maintaining Quebec's political and democratic weight in the House of Commons. If they were sincere when they say that Quebec is a nation within Canada, they would not vote to reduce Quebec's democratic weight to below its demographic weight in this chamber. Yet, that is precisely what the Conservatives and the Liberals did.

I heard Liza Frulla express her views during a television program called *Le club des ex*. She said, just before the vote, that the member for Bourassa would never vote against Quebec on an issue such as this one, that the Liberals would never consider reducing Quebec's political weight. Personally, I was not surprised to see the member for Bourassa rise and vote against Quebec—along with the Conservatives—to reduce Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons. I was not surprised at all, because that is how the Liberal Party has been operating since the days of Pierre Trudeau. Over the past 40 years, the Liberals have had only one strategy. They never stop using it. When Meech was in the picture, they had no problem with that. They just sent Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Marc Lalonde and the old gang to block any attempt to give Quebec better recognition within Canada, because such a thing is against their religion. Indeed, under the “Trudeauesque” religion, all provinces are equal. Under the Conservative religion, there is one province that is different, that forms a nation. However, that province is not going to get any real recognition, and whenever the issue is going to come up, its political weight and its recognition will be diminished.

Business of Supply

We talked about securities and about the number of seats here, but let us also talk about the language of work. Since August 26, 1977, the Charter of the French Language gives all workers in Quebec the right to work in French, and it gives them the right to get their collective agreement, their employer's memos and so on in French. However, that is not the case at the federal level, because the Canada Labour Code applies to all areas that come under federal legislation.

• (1150)

For example, if a person works at a radio station and is a union member, his union is governed by the Canada Labour Code and not the Quebec Labour Code, even if the station is in Quebec. Radiocommunications and telecommunications come under federal jurisdiction. This is a good example.

If you work for a bus company in Gatineau—the buses cross the border between Ontario and Quebec, even if it is a virtual border—the employer can require its employees to speak English, even if that has nothing to do with the work of a bus driver. It is just to accommodate the employer.

If you work for a cell telephone company in Rimouski and the new unilingual anglophone boss from British Columbia—and this really happened—requires that those around him at least be able to speak to him in English, that constitutes linguistic knowledge to accommodate the employer and not to perform the task. This has been illegal in Quebec since August 26, 1977, but it is entirely permitted at the federal level, and it is still going on.

The NDP has a bill which, while not scrapping the Official Languages Act, would give this right to workers in Quebec. The Conservatives voted against it, but because they are a minority, they still need a dance partner. Who was the dance partner of the Conservative Party when language of work was the issue? The same member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine who, in an article published in *The Gazette* and the *Journal de Montréal*, explained very proudly that the Liberal Party of Canada would not support better protection for French as the language of work in Quebec in companies under federal jurisdiction. That is the truth.

Let us drop the meaningless phrases. One such phrase was even invented earlier by the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, and it is too wonderful not to be repeated. Now they are talking to us about “convergence federalism”. Now it is convergence. Here is what this is converging on: no recognition of the need to be bilingual on the Supreme Court; less political weight for Quebec in the House of Commons; and theft of the provincially regulated securities sector so that it can be transferred to Toronto. That is the Brinks job, part II, voted for and supported by the Liberals and Conservatives.

In the case of Bill 104, the motions tabled in the House might have political weight. The incredibly ill-advised decision of the Supreme Court of Canada made Bill 101 meaningless. We are still awaiting a response from the Quebec government, which is slow in coming.

Motions such as the one we are discussing today may have a concrete effect. It would have been better to have something concrete on the table today. If the Bloc Québécois had said it was necessary to entrench recognition of the Quebec nation in the

Constitution, the NDP would have been the first to support it. And who knows, that might have helped Quebec.

• (1155)

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I must interrupt the hon. member. We will suspend the sitting because of the fire alarm.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:58 a.m.)

• (1220)

[*English*]

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12:22 p.m.)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Outremont has two minutes. I did not think his remarks before were terribly inflammatory, but we will allow him to respond for two minutes, then we will move on to questions and comments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, as you know, I often get fired up when I speak in the House; however, I did not believe things would get so inflammatory, not this time anyway. Evidently, I ignited something. Now that the fire alarm has stopped, I will use my remaining two minutes—

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I believe debate has resumed, but the interpreters have not yet returned. I just want to make sure the translation is available.

[*English*]

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 12:23 p.m.)

The Deputy Speaker: Perhaps we will suspend for a few moments until that situation is remedied.

• (1225)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12:25 p.m.)

The Deputy Speaker: I think we are now prepared to go on. I see that both interpreters are in their stations. I thank them for returning and I will hand the floor back to the hon. member for Outremont for two minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, to sum up, we have before us a Bloc motion that concludes there is nothing to be done in order to improve the lot of Quebec inside Canada, that not only any attempt at constitutional reform is doomed to failure, but also that no offer Quebec could consider will ever be forthcoming.

We do not agree. We are more optimistic. There have been attempts in the past like the Meech Lake accord and the Charlottetown agreement. But the Bloc rejected both. They cannot complain about the failure of these agreements. They wanted Meech to fail. They cannot pretend today that they are unhappy that it failed. And the reason why they were against both Meech and Charlottetown is the same.

Business of Supply

Any agreement with the rest of Canada would take the wind out of the sovereigntist sails and would prove that Canada is worth the effort.

People who are interested in this issue can go to the New Democratic Party website and read the Sherbrooke statement, which was developed under the leadership of our current leader, who is, by the way, the first NDP leader who was born in Quebec. It is a vision of openness aiming at creating winning conditions for Quebec inside Canada, and for Canada inside Quebec.

According to yesterday's survey, four Quebecers out of five want Quebec to be recognized. But for now, any recognition is feigned because all that is being done goes against the recognition of the Quebec nation. This recognition should be enshrined in the Constitution if it is to have real meaning.

We would no longer have to watch the Conservatives play their little games when they vote against bilingualism for the Supreme Court judges, when they vote against giving fair recognition to Quebec by maintaining its political weight, when they carry out their deeds with the constant support of the Liberals.

The NDP has a very open vision of Quebec and its future within Canada. It is unfortunate that we do not have more Bloc members who share this kind of vision.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member for Outremont of a few historical facts.

First of all, the Bloc québécois, as a political entity, did not oppose the Meech Lake accord because the Bloc québécois did not exist when the accord died. I suggest the member take another look at his history books. All the more because the NDP played a major role in the failure of the Meech Lake accord. The NDP is his party. I will remind the House that at the time, Ms. McLaughlin chose to oppose the Meech Lake accord. That created a rift within the NDP, causing Ed Broadbent to literally leave the party. All this was on top of the fact that the Premier of Manitoba, who was a New Democrat, opposed the Meech Lake accord, in particular the parts dealing with the principle of spending powers.

The Bloc did not create the constitutional crisis; in fact, it is actually a victim of the crisis. It was all down to the NDP at the time. The NDP reached record lows in terms of committed voters a few years later, in 1993.

There are no lessons to be learned from the NDP, because although the party may claim today that federalism is a system which can evolve, it was first in line to shoot it down.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, when I hear reactions like that, I realize that it is a prophecy which is fulfilled every time there is a failure. The Bloc québécois's aim is to create failure upon failure; it is a litany of lamentations. Yes, the Bloc québécois was created in the wake of the Meech Lake accord, that is a fact, but the entire membership of the Bloc, who at the time were péquistes or strong supporters of Quebec sovereignty, worked hard to kill the Meech Lake accord and the Charlottetown accord. When that happened, they started howling because they got what they wanted. That is what it is to be constantly complaining about one's lot. That is what drives the members of the Bloc. Instead of taking a

constructive approach, instead of tabling a motion today to have Quebec's status as a nation recognized in the Constitution, which is what four out of five Quebecers want, they moan and table a motion that puts the conclusion before the premise. That is the way the Bloc québécois thinks: the conclusion comes first. That does not work, so they state the premise. The reason it does not work is there is never going to be a way to give them what they want. What they want is not an improvement or change in Quebec's constitutional status within Canada. Their sole objective is to say they are leaving. The problem is that our institutions are taken for granted.

There is another problem. When Jacques Parizeau said, as he bowed out of political life, that there was an inescapable duty to the million Francophones outside Quebec, was that just a beautiful line from Jean-François Lisée? Are they going to put their heads down and continue fighting to make Quebec insignificant in the House through their morbid actions, or are they going to build for the future? That is the difference between our two political parties.

I will end my comments on the historical role of the NDP by saying that the member for Toronto-Centre, who at the time was Premier of Ontario, was one of the leaders who fought for the Meech Lake accord. It was the biggest province, it had an NDP government, and that is part of the history of the NDP.

• (1230)

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Outremont claims that our party is trying to destroy everything in Quebec, when in fact no government has ever engaged as flexible an open federalism as this Conservative government has. We are working on building a strong Quebec within a united Canada—I repeat, a strong Quebec within a united Canada—so that the Quebec nation recognized by this House in November 2006 can fully thrive and shine both across Canada and on the international scene. As for the NDP, it has tried and continues to try to create a submissive Quebec within a predatory federal system, as did the Liberals repeatedly between 1993 and 2006.

Could my colleague from Outremont explain to the House why his centralizing party voted against restoring fiscal balance in 2007?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: How shameful, Mr. Speaker. Shame on the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup and former mayor of one of the administrative seats for La Pocatière. That is what we call a token Quebecer. To rise in the House and have the nerve to defend the Conservative Party, which is fighting against the requirement for Supreme Court judges to be bilingual. He votes with his party, then comes here looking for applause from his western friends and is pleased with himself. He will say he did it in case a unilingual French speaker is appointed to the Supreme Court. Funny thing, that never happened in the 150 years since the Supreme Court was established. How shameful to vote against oneself. He is rehashing old speeches on the so-called centralizing party. Let me make speeches about a centralizing party.

Business of Supply

The Conservative members of Parliament from Quebec are voting for the redistribution of seats in the House of Commons, with the only big loser being Quebec. Quebec is the only province whose number of allocated seats will drop below the percentage of the population that it represents. He will be voting for that, and he thinks that he can come and tell others what to do. How shameful. He votes against his own language and against the representation of his province in this House, he votes with the Conservatives to demolish the securities system in Quebec, he gets applauded by his western friends, and he is proud of it. How shameful.

[English]

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I do not understand in this debate is the personal nature of some of the comments being made.

In Saskatchewan we are very passionate about politics. I disagree very strongly with the CCF and NDP tradition of our province. It is the same with the views in western Canada about Mr. Pierre Trudeau's governing of the country. But I have never heard anyone refer to someone in Saskatchewan as not being a true Saskatchewanian, as someone who is not true to his or her ethnicity or whatever. From my perspective, it is not exactly polite and proper discourse.

I had anticipated hearing this from the Bloc Québécois but not from a federalist politician. My question for the member is, why does he insist on personalizing the issue when referring to people who disagree with his position, Quebec Conservative MPs, as not true Quebecers? Why is he attacking them on their personal motivation? Why does he not just accept that they have a different vision for the country? It seems to me to be somewhat impolite.

• (1235)

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, had he understood the speech from his colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, he would have known that it was directed toward me personally. I do not have a problem with that. If he tells me that I am wrong to vote the way I do on those issues in the House, I will remind him that in the few weeks he has been here, that member from Quebec, whose party is supposed to have recognized Quebec as a nation, voted against his own language and was applauded by his western gang for voting against bilingualism at the Supreme Court of Canada. He voted against recognition of Quebec by the House. Quebec is the only province that stands to lose democratic weight in the House and whose representation will be less than its population. The member made a mess in the securities industry which is a purely provincial jurisdiction. It is shameful for Quebecers to vote in favour of that.

Moreover, the two answers of another token Quebecer, the Minister of Natural Resources, were doublespeak. He said that that was voluntary because the provinces make the decision. The issue was referred to the Supreme Court. On the first point, that does not make sense. It is not voluntary; once the organization has been created, it will be the only one. Second, if they were remotely sincere, they would not spend taxpayers' money because the issue has not been ruled on yet by the Supreme Court. This is utter hypocrisy.

This is not personal, but it has everything to do with the way some people represent their riding in the House. I repeat that the member should be ashamed of himself.

Mr. Daniel Pailé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to begin, I want to say that I will be sharing my time with our party's whip, the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord. I have worked with extraordinary whips, in another Parliament, but never with one like him. I am proud to congratulate him and pay tribute to him.

A moment ago, the member for Outremont said that his leader was the first and only leader of the NDP to be born in Quebec. I am a little concerned when I think that if the present leader of the NDP was born in Quebec, that might mean that the member for Outremont could not succeed him. I did some checking, and I now know that the member for Outremont was born in Ontario, and so the NDP will be able to alternate between the present leader and the next leader of the NDP.

A moment ago, I thought that Yvon Deschamps had become a member of this House. Advocating an independent Quebec in a united Canada, that is what the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup said. I cannot get over hearing such a thing. Yesterday, I said that the people in the Conservative Party were a pathetic bunch. With this kind of speech, we have exactly the same thing.

Why do we have a motion like this today? I do not agree with the member for Outremont when he said that things were being done backwards. In fact, he needs to look at the verb that is the fourth word in this motion, that this House "acknowledge". So our motion is to remind the House of Commons that we need to acknowledge. Acknowledgment implies knowing what needs to be acknowledged.

It is obvious that after 20 years, essentially nothing has been done in terms of the renewal process and offers to Quebec. Ultimately, either you stay the way you are, which is not what we want, or you take what you need to take and accept all the challenges we have to meet and you create your own country. You are not doing it against the other people's country. That is absolutely not the case. Canada is a great democratic country, and in fact it allows us to be here to argue our views, properly and honourably, and to say to ourselves quite simply that we want to build our own country. I want my own country because I see that trying to put two nations, two such different realities, in one box is an enormous waste.

I made a list. There are two finance departments, two revenue departments, that handle our business; two departments of industry, trade, science and technology. I was the Minister for Industry, Trade, Science and Technology in Quebec and I constantly had to argue with another finance minister about industrial and trade policy. I did not understand what he was doing there. I did not understand why that very remarkable individual had another vision. Why should his vision apply to us?

Business of Supply

There are two environment departments. Our colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie saw how limited we were at Copenhagen. The person speaking for us would say the complete opposite of what we had to propose. We have two ministers of culture. Here, that is called “Canadian Heritage”. We have two health departments, two justice departments, two labour departments. Some people are under provincial jurisdiction, others are under federal jurisdiction. We have two public safety departments, two transport departments, two communications departments, two agriculture departments, two immigration departments, a governor general and a lieutenant-governor. What a waste!

Before being here, I worked specifically in financial management, and we did not have two head offices.

● (1240)

We had only one and we managed things right.

I also want to take advantage of this opportunity to talk about securities and the federal government’s most recent assault on the jurisdictions of the provinces, especially Quebec’s.

The Canadian system works very well within North America and internationally. I am not saying that if our provincial securities commissions were a disaster, we should not try to do something about it, but the system works. If it ain’t broke, why fix it?

The last two examples were lauded by the Minister of Finance. There is the Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada—IIROC—which covers all the provincial regulatory organizations. It even signed agreements with China, no less, to help with the regulation of securities trading.

As a result of the difficulties in Greece that we discussed last week and the computer errors last Thursday on the New York Stock Exchange, financial markets were in turmoil. But Canada did quite well. The Minister of Finance himself said the system had worked very well.

What is this system? Once again, IIROC regulated it very well along with the Canadian Securities Administrators, the CSA. It worked. And who chairs the CSA? It is the president of the Autorité des marchés financiers du Québec, who has the confidence of all his colleagues in the provinces and territories. The system works.

Why do they want to add another? Why do they want to waste millions of dollars and encroach on other jurisdictions? This is what does not work in Canada. It is the incredible desire of one people to say to the other that even if a system works, they are going to show them how to screw things up.

The reason for a securities commission or the Autorité des marchés financiers du Québec is to provide regulation and be in close contact with the people who are issuing shares and purchasing them. The system will not work if the provincial commissions are all closed down and they try to have a Canada-wide agency managing the securities sector in a vacuum.

I also want to mention what they are trying to steal from Quebec. Yesterday, the Autorité des marchés financiers du Québec and the Quebec finance minister tabled a study and said they were strongly opposed to this plan, as are financial circles in Quebec. It is not just

about regulation but human capital as well. The greatest asset of a securities commission is not financial capital but human capital. What is this human capital? It is the people who work in the financial sector and were trained at McGill, or UQAM, or HEC Montréal or Laval. Where do they find interesting, well-paying jobs? In Montreal, thanks to the Autorité des marchés financiers du Québec.

A securities commission means people who work in taxation, in commercial law, in securities law, in accounting and in information technology. It also means all the offices they rent.

● (1245)

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that there is a broad coalition of business people in Quebec. These are not fringe groups but solid business people who are telling the federal government to mind its own business until the day that Quebec is sovereign.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague from the Bloc who just huffed and puffed in front of us.

Last weekend, the Bloc held some sort of assembly or conference with separatist academics to think about their future. However, they forgot to invite—unless they did not want him there—one of the great premiers of Quebec, the leader of the yes camp in 1995, Lucien Bouchard.

Did they not invite him because he said sovereignty would not happen in his lifetime? Maybe it was because he said Quebec had deeper problems than sovereignty. Quebec has problems with its economy, education system and health system. They did not invite Mr. Bouchard to hear what he had to say. In my opinion, he was a great Quebecer. I would like to know what my colleague thinks about that.

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Mr. Speaker, I agree with a small part of what he just said.

When he says that Lucien Bouchard is a great man and that he did a lot for Quebec, I totally agree with him. However I think the member opposite should have come to the seminar. The doors were open. I would have lent him the \$60 it would have cost him. Attending this *Intellectuels pour la souveraineté* seminar and hearing everything that was said there about the situation would have been helpful to him.

Mr. Bouchard no longer takes part in these types of meeting. He still has an excellent relationship with members of the Bloc, as the leader of the Bloc and member for Laurier—St-Marie indicated. Mr. Bouchard said very clearly that the Bloc’s work is fundamental. Is the former member for Manicouagan, Mr. Mulroney, always invited to seminars organized by the Conservative Party? I am not sure. To Lucien Bouchard, the doors of the Bloc will always be open.

Business of Supply

●(1250)

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking our wonderful new member for Hochelaga for the kind things he had to say about me in my role as whip. It is rare for someone to crack a whip and then be thanked for it. He was only recently elected, so he has yet to feel the brunt. I do want to thank him, however. His election as the member for Hochelaga, with all the baggage he has, is great for our party. It is unfortunate that I am not allowed to mention him by name, but when he was Minister of Industry in Quebec, his legacy was the Paillé Plan. I am not using his name; I am using the name of the plan. I thank him again for his comments.

I am pleased to speak to this motion, because May 2010 marks the anniversary of an important event that took place 20 years ago. I will start by putting things in context. The people listening to us may have forgotten or they may be young people who were not born or did not follow politics at that time. I would like to reiterate two statements.

On June 22, 1990, a few hours before Meech failed, someone said in the National Assembly, “English Canada must clearly understand that, no matter what, Quebec is today and for all times a distinct society, free and capable of assuming its destiny and its development.” That someone was then premier Robert Bourassa, a federalist.

On June 24, 1990, Jean Duceppe, a prominent actor in Quebec, summed up the feeling among Quebecers. In the aftermath of Meech, in his patriotic speech at the start of Fête nationale celebrations, Jean Duceppe, father of our current leader, said, “My dear friends, as the days and weeks pass, one thing becomes crystal clear in our minds: Quebec is our one and only country.”

I like to compare a people’s march toward fulfilment and sovereignty to a personal experience of mine. It is similar to a young couple in their early twenties who are dating and come to an agreement to live together.

I remember that my girlfriend and I came to a cross-roads after dating for a year and a half. We reached a turning point, a cross-roads, decision time. I remember going to see my mother and telling her that I was going to move in with my girlfriend. I remember how she threw a major fit. She is probably listening to me right now because my parents are retired and they follow the debates of the House regularly. She told me that I could not do that to her, that I belonged in her house. She said that she would cook for me, that I would not have to pay anything, that she would wash my clothes and clean my room even though it was extremely messy. She said that there was so much stuff lying around my room that she had trouble opening the door because of the clothes that had piled up. Why would I do that to her?

It is the exact same thing when a people moves towards sovereignty. It is the decision of a mature people. It is not against anyone else. It is not because we no longer love them, but because we decided to cut the apron strings. I told my mother that we would eat baloney sandwiches and Kraft Dinner. It was true that it would be difficult financially since I was not paying anything at home, but I had decided to spread my wings.

●(1255)

I decided to break free not because I did not love them, but because I had decided to build something with my girlfriend, who became my wife and the mother of my two children.

That is what the rest of Canada should understand. We are telling the rest of Canada to get ready because it will happen. It will not be able to say that we have taken it by surprise. We sometimes hear Conservative members, especially from the western provinces, talk about how much Canada pays us and how much Quebec costs Canada. I tell them to let us go. We want to go. But we are democrats and I think the sovereignist movement has shown that clearly for a number of years. The lock to the safe will be opened when the people of Quebec say yes to themselves.

As parliamentarians, we travel abroad or we greet delegations of foreign parliamentarians. One of their concerns, especially for American parliamentarians, with whom we have good and very close relations, is that it should not be done by force. We tell them it will happen through a democratic process. There will be no violence.

We have already had two referendums. It is true that Quebecers decided to say no on both occasions. There is a principle according to which pulling on a flower will not make it grow faster. On those occasions, in 1980 and in 1995, the people said no.

But I know and I sense that, on the ground, in our meetings, in our contacts and dealings with ordinary citizens, they realize that Canada today is not working. It will never work as Quebec would like it to.

We will have the opportunity to answer the question that Quebecers have been asked for many years: what does Quebec want? Quebec wants to become an independent country. Quebec wants to speak with its own voice in the community of nations. Quebec wants to have more than just its flag at the United Nations.

My colleague from Hochelaga rightly mentioned the various international conferences on the environment where our colleague, the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, had the opportunity to represent the Bloc. The Quebec environment ministers said they would work hard and make Quebec’s voice heard, but from the sidelines. They met people from other countries who were going to get a coffee in the cafeteria or going to the washroom. They were working hard. They were working on the sidelines.

For that reason it is sometimes discouraging to see the members and the ministers of the Quebec Liberal Party settling for so little.

We are a proud people, with a French language and culture. We want to stand tall before people. We want to talk to our counterparts as equals.

On the international scene, Quebec can command the same respect as Finland, Sweden and Slovakia, smaller countries, and countries that have fewer natural resources and riches than Quebec.

We are asking for respect because we have come to the conclusion that the Canada of today, in which we operate, cannot be reformed. It would not work and we believe that no matter what happens in the future, we will have seen it all before.

Business of Supply

Yesterday, I met with a group and we went to visit the Senate, which costs \$54 million per year in political patronage appointments for Conservatives and Liberals. My visitors, some elderly people, asked me what it would take to get rid of the Senate. We have to achieve sovereignty. In a sovereign Quebec, there would no longer be a Senate or a Governor General or a Lieutenant Governor representing the British Crown.

• (1300)

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member and I think that the cat got out of the bag. He described his vision of a sovereign Quebec. He said that that would be economically difficult and that people would have to eat baloney and Kraft Dinner. That is his vision of Quebec. On this side of the House, we see things differently.

Does the member want everyone in Quebec to eat Kraft Dinner or does he have a real vision for that province?

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I do not understand why the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière is so contemptuous about Kraft Dinner, which is produced in Montreal, just beside the Côte-de-Liesse interchange. It is as good as any other food. One wonders whether the member is listening to the right interpretation channel. He seems to need interpretation from French to French.

I just wanted to give the example of my mother, who would put a warm meal on the table for me even before I had time to take my coat off. When I was living with my parents, we ate Kraft Dinner. To gain independence, I cooked it myself. The member should not start saying that in a sovereign Quebec everybody would have to eat baloney. Once again, he misunderstood.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will make an allegorical reference to mothers that is more serious than what the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière said.

I will ask the member for Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ) whether his mother, when she became a mother-in-law, got along well with his wife. Are his parents, whom I say hello to because I know they are listening, not better off now that they are on the same footing as my whip and his spouse than they would be if the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord had stayed with them, like one of those “kippers”, kids in parents' pockets eroding retirement savings?

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the relationship that followed was indeed based on mutual respect. Some say that the rest of Canada will have no choice but to take note of Quebecers' democratic decision and continue with discussions and negotiations.

This reminds me of something Mr. Parizeau said during the 1995 referendum. He noted that English Canada may be unhappy when Quebecers decide to become a sovereign nation, that relations may be strained for a few weeks and that they may not want to talk to us. However, when the time comes to discuss the division of assets and liabilities—I am not an economist and I do not have a financial background like my colleague from Hochelaga—we will be the ones signing the cheques. So they will have no choice but to come to the table.

If they do not want to talk to us, they are not going to roll up the sod on the Plains of Abraham, which will stay in Quebec. The plains will be in federal territory while we discuss how to divide assets and debts. So they will have no choice.

The same is true of western beef. Some say that Alberta will be mad and will stop selling its beef to Quebec. Quebecers consume 50% of Alberta's beef production. If we become a sovereign nation, we will not start eating rice. We will still go to McDonald's and eat steak. If Alberta's producers stop selling us beef because they are mad at us, we will import it from Argentina, Chile or Brazil, which produce excellent beef. So Alberta will lose the customer that buys 50% of its production.

Alberta's premier will then ask Albertans to eat two steaks instead of one if they want to keep the jobs in their slaughterhouses.

• (1305)

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my duty to join the debate on the motion before the House moved by the hon. member for Joliette. It is a duty because I am a true Quebecer. My roots and those of my children are in Quebec, and those of an entire future generation will be as well.

This motion makes me very worried about our future as full-fledged Quebecers within a strong, prosperous and united Canada, where life is good.

Today, I would like to direct hon. members' attention to a specific point in the motion where the hon. member for Joliette seems to suggest that we Quebecers are not being considered within Canada. He might as well be saying we are ghosts and we do not count. That disappoints me greatly because I do feel as though I exist within Canada, as many of us do. We Quebecers are vibrant, dynamic and focused on the future.

In speaking of Quebec, the hon. member for Joliette states that “its status as a nation still has not been recognized in the Canadian Constitution”. The hon. member seems to be insinuating that the absence of such recognition proves that federalism cannot be renewed and that the interests of Quebec are not well served within Canada. I think this observation is totally false, and I would like to take the few minutes allotted to me to prove it.

No one will be surprised to hear me say that the Bloc's motion was predictable. It is as predictable as the tulips blooming in our nation's capital in spring. I am surprised, however, to see a sovereigntist party use the Meech Lake accord as a reference in discussing constitutional reform when the sovereigntist movement was against the accord in 1990.

In fact, it was in the wake of Meech that the Bloc was born. That is another 20th anniversary that will not go unnoticed. This interim party, which was to pave the way for Quebec's sovereignty, has since become permanent. But that is neither here nor there.

Business of Supply

The member for Joliette's party does not agree with our approach to federalism. The other opposition parties may oppose it too, but their ultimate goal is different from the Bloc's. We feel very strongly that our country works well, that we are steering it in the right direction and that Quebec both contributes to it and benefits from it. For very clear reasons, the Bloc has a different view.

I would still like to thank the member for his initiative, because it allows me to underscore the many benefits Quebec enjoys within the Canadian federation. Reality is very different from the grim picture painted by the member for Joliette. The facts show that Quebec as a society is developing, thriving and moving forward within Canada, and that is no coincidence.

Within Canada, Quebec has its own education system, its own Civil Code and its own Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. Quebec collects its own personal and corporate income taxes. It chooses its immigrants and is active on the world scene. In certain areas, it can sign agreements with foreign governments. It has created unique institutions, like Hydro-Québec, Télé-Québec, the Régie des rentes, the Caisse de dépôt et placement, the Société générale de financement and many others. It has established its own student financial assistance program. It has passed laws that allow it to protect and promote the French language and its cultural identity. In all these areas, Quebec has all the necessary latitude to make choices that reflect its values and interests.

• (1310)

Quebec covers a huge territory and promotes a unique culture, partly because of its French character. Its economy is diversified and is based on many natural resources. As a member of the Canadian federation, it has become a world leader in the areas of business, science and technology. It is also a leader in the aerospace, agri-food, multimedia, computer services, software and telecommunications sectors.

Thanks to Quebecers' dynamic approach and sense of entrepreneurship, Quebec played a key role in developing the North American Free Trade Agreement, in opening the American market to Canadian products, and now in negotiating a free trade agreement between Canada and the European Union, which would be the largest free trade agreement signed in Canadian history.

Quebec controls most of the economic and social levers to ensure its development. The Quebec government has many powers in the health, education, culture and social services sectors. It also has more influence than some other provinces in areas such as immigration, taxation and international relations. Quebecers are attached to the same universal values of tolerance, compassion, solidarity and respect for differences than other Canadians.

The Quebec and Canadian identities are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they complement each other. Canada is envied by many other countries because of its standard of living and quality of life. Like Canadians from the other provinces and territories, Quebecers benefit from these assets and enjoy enviable prosperity. The picture I just painted is not that of a poor, isolated society incapable of ensuring its prosperity, development and influence.

What the member for Joliette and his colleagues refuse to see is that Quebec is capable of being itself within Canada and of

controlling its future without resorting to separation. Quebecers have been able to protect and promote their identity within Canada by creating policies and institutions, both at the federal and provincial levels, that ensure the preservation and thriving of their culture and language.

Over the years, Canada has been able to accommodate Quebec's difference, thus allowing the province to thrive within the federation. The Quebec government plays a major role in the development of the Canadian Francophonie and participates actively, along with the Government of Canada, to the Francophonie's initiatives, while also voicing its views within the Canadian delegation at international forums, such as UNESCO.

A motion stating that Quebecers form a nation within a united Canada was adopted in the House of Commons in November 2006, with the support of the Bloc Québécois. What the Bloc is implying with this motion is that without constitutional recognition as a nation, Quebec cannot develop, thrive and achieve its legitimate goals. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It seems to me doubly simplistic to cast Quebec as a community that cannot develop in all areas of human activity and whose future prospects depend on the labels the Bloc is trying to pin on it through a motion debated in the House of Commons. The truth is that Quebec is already taking charge of its own development within Canada and reaping the benefits of Canadian federalism, while making an outstanding contribution to the country's development and heritage. I would like to talk about this last point for a moment.

Quebec's contribution to Canada's identity derives mainly from three elements: the predominance of French, Quebec's unique culture and its civil law tradition. These unique and original features of Quebec are part and parcel of the heritage of all Canadians. Our open federalism not only recognizes this fact, it uses the strengths that each province and territory brings to our federation.

• (1315)

While most Quebecers are rightly proud of their identity as Quebecers, they are no less proud of their Canadian identity. What they want and what most Canadians want is for their governments to work for the common good and, through their actions, create a Canada-wide partnership based on solidarity and respect for our diversity.

We have worked very hard to see to it that Canada works well by emphasizing consultation and collaboration among all levels of government, which is what our fellow citizens want.

We are making progress, and our relations with our partners are proving successful in many areas. We are taking real steps to meet the ever-changing needs of Canadians in all parts of the country.

Business of Supply

In the specific case of Quebec, we have already acted on our desire to highlight Quebec's unique position with Canada by reaching an agreement on its role in UNESCO and supporting the festivities to mark Quebec City's 400th anniversary.

This contribution was made possible by the leadership of my colleague, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and minister responsible for the Quebec City region, and the co-operation among the three levels of government throughout the festivities.

We know that Quebec's international activities did not begin yesterday. In La Francophonie, Quebec has always worked to maintain special ties with its international partners who share the use of French: 105 million francophones spread over five continents.

The Government of Quebec has played a decisive role not only in creating and developing francophone institutions, but also in defining their role and carrying out their multilateral activities.

The agreement it signed with the Government of Canada on May 5, 2006 means that the government of Quebec is represented fully and in accordance with its wishes as part of the Canadian delegation for the proceedings, meetings and conferences of UNESCO.

That agreement not only shows that the present government is meeting its commitments to Quebec, it also highlights the fact that open federalism produces tangible results.

Examples of those tangible results are the recognition of the Quebec nation, Quebec's role in UNESCO and the restoration of fiscal balance.

On that last point, the Bloc had no option but to vote for the 2007 budget, which restored fiscal balance in the federation, since it was a demand that had been made by Quebeckers.

Our government, like a majority of Quebeckers, holds the deep conviction that the development, vitality, progress and prosperity of Quebec society are more secure within the Canadian federation than in the political separation advocated by the Bloc, the hypothetical benefits of which have never been proven, more than 40 years after the founding of the Quebec sovereignist movement.

Quebeckers have to understand that whatever form the recognition of their uniqueness might take within the framework of the Canadian federation, the Bloc will always oppose it, firmly, resolutely and inevitably, because that is the reason for its existence.

But Quebeckers understand, above all, that their interests do not lie in isolation, semantics and symbolism. Contrary to what the Bloc says, it is not in spite of Canada that Quebec has become a strong society, rich in its diversity and looking to the future. Our federation makes it possible for Quebeckers to be themselves in our country, which is also their country, just as it does Newfoundlanders, Ontarians or Albertans.

Quebeckers know who they are. They know they participated in the founding of Canada and they have helped to shape this country, in all its greatness.

• (1320)

They know they have protected their language and their culture, while promoting their values and their interests within Canada. And

they know they can be both Canadians and Quebeckers, and they do not need to choose between the two, as the Bloc would like to persuade them to do.

I would now like to return to one of the points I addressed earlier, which is, to my mind, the greatest advantage our formula for government offers to our partners in the federation, namely that federalism can adapt to modern challenges. Federalism is in fact one of the political structures best adapted to meet the modern challenges facing societies today.

The Canadian political and economic union, Canada's significant influence on the international scene, its reputation as a solid creditor on the international markets, its quality of life—

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member but the interpretation system is not working.

It is working now.

The hon. member still has four minutes.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that the devotees of separation have never succeeded in demonstrating to Quebeckers that they would be more prosperous and fulfilled if only they split from Canada. In actual fact, Quebeckers are well aware of what Canadian federalism offers them. That is why most continue to oppose separation and want to remain both Canadians and Quebeckers.

There is no contradiction in this dual identity. Quite to the contrary, they enrich and enhance one another. Yes, the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada, whether with or without constitutional recognition. The Canadian federation already acknowledges this reality.

The debate we are having today is actually good for something though. First of all, it reveals the true face of the Bloc, in whose eyes the word nation really means separation—a step that Ms. Marois herself says would result in a period of instability. One of our Bloc colleagues evoked it just a little while ago in wishing Kraft Dinner on all Quebeckers.

In addition, this debate highlights the need for a united Canada, a country in which Quebeckers have flourished while making a tremendous contribution. Our debate also heightens their awareness of all the advantages Quebec has as part of Canada in dealing with and adapting to the many challenges of the modern world. I can well imagine, though, that this is not exactly what the hon. member for Joliette had in mind in introducing his motion.

Quebeckers, like all Canadians, are well aware and very proud of their country's enviable reputation all over the world. This reputation is no accident and is the result of the values that Canadians share from sea to sea. It is rooted in their deep conviction, strengthened and reinforced throughout their history, that Canada stands in the eyes of other peoples around the world for something that is truly grand and noble.

Quebeckers, with their very unique characteristics, are no less animated by this ideal than Canadians in other parts of the country. It is the values Canadians cultivate from sea to sea that bind this country together.

Business of Supply

Although the word values has often been trivialized, it assumes its full meaning here. We are proud of what Canada has become and of what Quebec is in the year 2010.

Since Confederation, Quebec's identity has developed into one of the key historical and political characteristics of Canada. The Québécois form a nation that has developed and flourished within the folds of a united country called Canada.

• (1325)

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I must say that this interminable speech was rather flat and spurious, from the first to the very last word.

The purpose of my question is to find out what is true and what is false. If everything the member said was true, I would not be here. We would not be here. We would not even be talking about the motion today. In six consecutive elections, Quebecers sent a majority of Bloc Québécois members to this House. He talked about the beauty of Canada, and I agree that it is truly beautiful, but if Quebec had its rightful place in Canada, we would not be here.

I would like the member to explain how the Bloc Québécois members managed to get six back-to-back majorities.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, 1,700,000 voting Quebecers do not represent the majority of the 7,500,000 Quebecers. Quebecers do form a nation and that nation developed and flourished as it continues to do in a united country called Canada. That evolution has served Quebec well. For its part, the rest of the country benefits from the invaluable contribution that Quebecers make to our common heritage.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since we are into semantics and symbolism, I would like the member to explain a paradox. While proclaiming to defend Quebec's interests, every time the National Assembly adopts a unanimous motion, the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière votes against it.

How can he pretend to defend Quebec's interests when he always votes against what Quebec decides for itself at the National Assembly? I remind him that the National Assembly is made up of members from different political parties, including parties that are close to the Conservative Party of Canada. The member should vote in favour of the decisions made by the Quebec National Assembly.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I will simply say to my dear colleague that it is pure wisdom on my part. This evolution is a testament to the wisdom of those who created our country and gave it a flexible framework within which people from all areas of the country could be themselves while contributing to the prosperity and progress of our whole community. Today, we must show the same wisdom in our march towards the future.

• (1330)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, our colleague has spoken a key sentence. I want to repeat it because it encapsulates his remarks. He said that Quebec is a precious part of Canada's heritage.

Does the member not realize he talks like an antique dealer? Antique dealers have taken from Quebec every last one of its heritage pieces and given them to the rest of Canada—or at least

taken them out of Quebec—and put their personal interests ahead of those of the community.

Is the same thing not happening when we see members from Quebec, like the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, sell out our Bill 101 and our securities commission? Worse still, Quebec's political weight is being traded away for personal gain, just like all antique dealers have done in the past.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, the member talked about history, but I would like to remind him that Quebec is the birthplace of Canada, our country today. It is thanks to the generosity of the French-speaking Québécois nation, which welcomed people from all over the world and helped them to settle in a new world. We welcomed the Irish, like my colleague from Lévis—Bellechasse.

It is through the arrival of people from other countries that we managed to build a country as strong as Canada. And in the future, we will continue to welcome people from all over the world to make Canada the best country of all. And I give my word in this House that Quebec will have a place in that country.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative member used the word “wisdom” when he talked about the motions adopted unanimously by the Quebec National Assembly. Yesterday, the Quebec Minister of Finance, along with a majority of representatives from the Quebec business sector, denounced the creation of a centralized securities commission based in Toronto.

I would like to know why, with all his wisdom, he is about to impose a measure that the Quebec National Assembly unanimously denounced. Now, it is the business sector which opposes the move. How can the member justify taking a stand against what Quebec wants?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, we work in co-operation with the provincial governments and we will continue to do that. The situation the member alludes to in the field of securities will be voluntary. If Quebec wants to opt in, it could do that. If it does not want to, it could keep its own commission. That is a voluntary arrangement and it will remain voluntary. I hope that the member has understood that.

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): I listened carefully to the member for Mégantic—L'Érable and I have a simple question for him. Could he enumerate the five basic conditions included in the Meech Lake accord?

• (1335)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I am extremely happy to see that my colleagues are listening so carefully today. The Bloc has asked me five questions. It is the first time in the House that I am lucky enough to be asked five such pertinent questions. I hope that my colleague knows the answer. I am sure that she knows it.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I hope the member is listening, because I will respond, but first I want to say that I will share my time with my extraordinary colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

The member for Lévis—Bellechasse can fill in his colleague seated next to him. Five amendments were proposed in the Meech Lake accord. That is the starting point. Quebec is at a crossroads now because the Meech Lake accord was not signed. If the Meech Lake accord had been signed, things in Canada and Quebec would be quite different.

Quebec's demands were: first, the recognition of Quebec as a distinct society and of the existence of the French fact and the English fact; second, a constitutional veto for Quebec and the other provinces regarding certain major amendments to the Constitution; third, a province's right to opt out, with full compensation, of any federal program in areas that fall under provincial jurisdiction; fourth, increased provincial powers in the area of immigration; fifth, provincial input in the federal government's appointment of the three Supreme Court judges from Quebec. We will come back to that fifth point.

It is unacceptable for the Conservative members from Quebec to say that they cannot support legislation that would require Supreme Court judges, not to be bilingual, but to be able to understand the proceedings of the Supreme Court in both English and French. That is completely unacceptable. That point only reinforces my belief that the only option for Quebec is to become sovereign, because we would then be able to administer our own taxes and our own laws.

I heard members say, as an excuse, that if we required Supreme Court judges to understand the two languages, it would prevent unilingual francophones from sitting on the Supreme Court. When I hear such ridiculous statements—and that is exactly what I have heard, maybe not in the House, but in committee—I find it totally unacceptable.

I do not know of a single lawyer or judge in the Supreme Court who was a unilingual francophone. However, I can say that I know at least three who spoke only English. These were Supreme Court judges. How did they understand proceedings in the Supreme Court? The Lord only knows, but I sure do not.

It is important to read this motion. I will repeat it for my colleague who does not understand:

That this House acknowledge that federalism cannot be renewed, since 20 years after the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, Quebec still does not have the power to choose three justices on the Supreme Court of Canada, or to opt out with compensation from federal programs in its areas of jurisdiction, nor does it have a real veto over constitutional amendments and its status as a nation still has not been recognized in the Canadian Constitution.

I heard my colleague say earlier that he was proud of the fact that Quebec was recognized as a nation within a united Canada. That is not a nation. A nation is France, Spain or Portugal. Those are nations that have shared central powers, for instance, regarding the army in some cases, a common currency—the Euro—and defence, for example, as well as other areas.

To be a nation, it means having all the powers a nation has. We will never have them all with this government. An extremely important factor for this government is the federal spending power.

• (1340)

When the Constitution was drafted in 1866—it was ratified in 1867, but the work began in Charlottetown in 1864—one of the

Business of Supply

powers that was granted to the central government was spending power. This power is extremely important to the central power because it allows it—and this is the crux of the problem—to invade areas of provincial jurisdiction and Quebec jurisdiction.

These include, for instance, education, culture and of course, the whole area of immigration. Yes, immigration comes under federal jurisdiction. That remained, but there was an agreement with Quebec. That deal is being scuttled more and more. The federal spending power has no limits and allows the federal government to invade areas of provincial jurisdiction.

How is it that Ottawa has a health department with 10,000 public servants, yet it does not run any hospital? The only hospital that was under federal jurisdiction was the Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Hospital in the riding of my colleague the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges. It will soon be under Quebec jurisdiction because Veterans Affairs no longer wants to take care of it. Why? Because it is too expensive. According to Veterans Affairs, there are fewer veterans. That is false. It all puts a strain on things.

Today I looked at the whole justice file. This entire file is extremely important and sensitive. The current government is making altogether regressive laws, but we know that the administration of justice comes under provincial jurisdiction. So what happens? The provinces will have to pay more and more to enforce the absolutely regressive laws that the Conservative government wants to adopt.

One thing is extremely important. If Quebec were a nation, as they on the other side seem to be saying, it would not be standing, practically hidden behind the curtains, at UNESCO meetings. During international meetings, Quebec could be seated at the table and could take part in the discussions.

The best example is the French fact. How can the government be the one looking after the French fact and the French language around the world when it is not even able to look after bilingualism in its own organizations?

We asked for a law. All we asked here, in the House, was that Bill 101 apply to federal institutions in Quebec. For those who do not know—and there seem to be many on the other side—Bill 101 is a law that allows Quebecers to speak French in their workplaces and that ensures that French is the language of work. How it is possible that they are not even able to enforce this law? They are not able to apply it to federal civil servants who work for federally regulated agencies or companies in Quebec.

Business of Supply

This raises all sorts of questions. There are many possible answers, but only one is realistic. We feel it is obvious that Quebec will never receive its fair share as part of this country. I am not the one who said it. "I appreciate that the House is based on proportional representation." That was said on May 17, 2007. "But I wonder whether there might be special measures to protect Quebec, which represents the main linguistic minority in Canada". That did not come from us. It was said by Benoît Pelletier, Quebec's minister of intergovernmental affairs.

I would like to finish with a quotation that I feel is important: "My dear friends, as the days and weeks pass, one thing becomes crystal clear in our minds: Quebec is our one and only country."

• (1345)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague on his speech on the Bloc Québécois motion. It brings into focus how relevant our presence in this place is, and in particular how relevant sovereignty is.

The time allotted to the member was too short to address the use that Conservative MPs and other federal MPs make of their presence here in terms of standing up for Quebec. I would like him to tell us what his perception is of the role played by Conservative members from Quebec who vote against measures promoting the French language—he did touch on that—and reducing Quebec's political weight in the Canadian Confederation. They also vote against other measures reducing Quebec's economic efficiency by establishing a national securities regulator. I would like to hear him on that.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I will add another example to the ones already given by my colleague.

I come from an area called Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Four days ago, the House passed Bill C-288 to grant a tax credit to young people who return to their region after training or graduating outside their region. My colleagues from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and Laurentides—Labelle were spokespersons on that bill. The fact of the matter is that every Conservative member from a Quebec region voted against the bill.

That is worse than learning that they root for the Vancouver Canucks. If only the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages visited our regions more often, he would easily understand that there are different regional bodies that have needs. One of those needs is for our young people to come back to our regions. He should stop cancelling initiatives in our regions and giving them to major centres like Vancouver and Toronto. Let us keep them; we need them. That is how we will bring back our young people and develop our regions. It find it unacceptable for members of Parliament from Quebec to vote against this kind of motion.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is deeply insulting to hear a Bloc member say things like that about Conservative members from Quebec. Bloc members voted against a human trafficking bill of significant importance to all parents and children. The Bloc Québécois voted against protecting children in Quebec and Canada. Bloc members would have us believe certain things about Conservative members from Quebec, but I am sure that the latter are doing everything in their power to protect parents and children.

I have a question about bilingual judges. The member made a number of remarks on the subject. I am almost perfectly bilingual, but I sometimes have trouble understanding the Quebec accents of the members on the other side of the House. Sometimes I have to listen to the simultaneous translation. What about judges who do not understand accents and idioms without the help of simultaneous translation?

• (1350)

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, my colleague should have heard the common law students who were here two days ago. They were from New Brunswick, Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, and their French was better than that of some Quebecers. They hope to be judges someday.

I can hardly believe that anyone in the House would say that people who want to be judges in Canada need learn only one language: English. Although I respect Justice John Major a great deal, I heard him with my own eyes—I did in fact see him and hear him—when he told the committee that he did not need to speak French because the translation seemed right to him and that when Supreme Court judges deliberate, they do so in English. Such statements are unacceptable.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to the motion brought forward by our House leader, the member for Joliette. I will take the time to read it again for the members, for you, Mr. Speaker, and for those who are watching us.

That this House acknowledge that federalism cannot be renewed, since 20 years after the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, Quebec still does not have the power to choose three justices on the Supreme Court of Canada, or to opt out with compensation from federal programs in its areas of jurisdiction, nor does it have a real veto over constitutional amendments and its status as a nation still has not been recognized in the Canadian Constitution.

It is important. Indeed, 20 years after the Meech Lake accord, we have to ask ourselves some questions, and that is exactly what the Bloc did. In fact, no one in the House has ever questioned the seriousness with which the Bloc approaches every issue. Obviously, the post-Meech analysis, 20 years later, had to be done properly, and that is what the Bloc Québécois did.

We conducted a survey and it is important that we report the results to the House to show the position of Quebecers and their expectations 20 years after the Meech Lake accord, as well as the position of Canadians. The survey was conducted just recently, between March 18 and April 6, 2010. There were 1,001 respondents in Quebec and 1,007 in Canada, outside Quebec. The results from Canada do not include the results from Quebec. The margin of error is plus or minus 3%. I say it, but when one hears the results, one understands that the difference is so significant that the margin of error is not even an issue.

I am the chief organizer for the Bloc Québécois, which means that political structure is of great interest to me. So I am going to say very nicely that, for the last 30 years, federalist pollsters have used a particular measure to qualify Quebecers. In their polls, they ask Quebecers if they consider themselves Quebecers, French Canadians or Canadians. It is important because many of my Conservative colleagues ripped their shirts in the House today to say they were Canadians. It would be important for them to hear what their constituents think about that.

In 2010, when Quebecers are asked whether they consider themselves Quebecers, French Canadians or Canadians, 67% say they are Quebecers, 21% that they are Canadians, and 12% that they are French Canadians. In 1995, when the referendum was held, 47% of Quebecers considered themselves to be Quebecers. It is important that Quebecers and Canadians listening to this debate understand clearly that as time goes by and Quebecers change, more of them will consider themselves Quebecers rather than Canadians, and their natural response will be that they are Quebecers.

This is important because our questionnaire asked what Quebecers and Canadians think of Quebec's place in Canada. Here are some of the questions asked in this opinion poll. Should the Canadian Constitution recognize that Quebec is a nation? A resolution was passed in the House of Commons to recognize the fact that Quebec is a nation. Should Canada's Constitution recognize Quebec's nationhood, and should that concept be enshrined in the Constitution? Seventy-three percent of Quebecers think that it should, and 27% do not. In the rest of Canada, we have the exact opposite, with 83% of Canadians thinking that Quebec's nationhood should not be enshrined in the Constitution, and 17% thinking that it should. We have two completely different perspectives on Quebec's place in Canada.

Should Canada undertake a new round of negotiations to find a constitutional agreement that is acceptable to Quebec? Many Quebecers think there are still three options: stay in Canada as it is, become a new country and separate from Canada, or modernize Canada.

● (1355)

This is what many Quebecers think. Between March 18 and April 6, Canadians and Quebecers were asked the following questions.

In response to the statement, "Canada should initiate a new round of negotiations in order to find a constitutional arrangement satisfactory to Quebec", 82% of Quebecers said a new round of negotiations is necessary while 61% of Canadians said the opposite.

Here is another question: "A new division of powers and resources must be negotiated between Quebec and Ottawa in order to give Quebec special status". It is no surprise that 73% of Quebecers said they want Quebec to have recognized special status within Canada while 71% of Canadians said no. Quebec considers itself to be a nation and was recognized as such by the House of Commons, which gives it special status.

In Quebec, language issues have been the subject of much debate. This gave rise to Bill 101, which was created to protect the French

Privilege

language. That is why one cannot poll Quebecers on Quebec's place in Canada without asking a question about language. In response to the statement, "The Quebec government should have greater power to protect French language and culture", 82% of Quebecers said yes and 69% of Canadians said no.

Once again in the last few months, the Supreme Court thwarted Quebec on the subject of bridging schools. These are the schools that were created to allow Francophones to access the English school system, which by law they are not permitted to do. Once more, 69% of Canadians said Quebec does not need more powers to protect its language while 82% of Quebecers said the opposite.

In response to the statement, "The Canadian government should respect the provisions of Bill 101, which makes French the only official language in Quebec's territory", 90% of Quebecers said yes and 74% of Canadians said no.

There is another question—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is rising on a point of order.

* * *

[*English*]

PRIVILEGE

PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE CANADIAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in your ruling of Tuesday, April 27, regarding the issue of providing information to members, you reserved entertaining a motion in order to allow House leaders, whips, ministers and party critics two weeks to suggest some way of providing documents without compromising the security and confidentiality of the information they contain. We have held meetings on this topic, and we are considering proposals.

We do have a unanimous request. As discussions are ongoing, we ask that you grant an extension of that deadline to Friday at the end of government orders. I believe if you were to ask it, you would confirm that this is indeed a unanimous request.

● (1400)

The Speaker: Is the government House leader's suggestion correct, that there is unanimous consent that I defer a decision on this matter until Friday at the conclusion of government orders?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel lost about a minute and a half of the time allotted to him for his comments. He will have an opportunity to continue his speech after question period. This is unfortunate for the hon. member, but nothing can be done about it.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]***MOTHER'S DAY**

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Sunday was Mother's Day and, in fact, every day should be a mother's day. Mothers are the foundation of the family and they play a significant role in bringing up their children. Mothers help make stronger families and stronger families make stronger communities and a stronger nation.

Recognizing the challenges, sacrifices and contributions of mothers in bringing up a family, the Conservative government has implemented the universal child care benefit and choice in daycare. In many societies, mothers face challenges, first as daughters, then as wives, as daughters-in-law and as mothers or grandmothers. Future mothers should be treated with respect and compassion.

It is our collective responsibility to help prevent female foeticide and provide girls with education and equal opportunities so they can also become better mothers in the global village. For all mothers, a very happy Mother's Day.

* * *

FLORENCE HONDERICH

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is humbling to stand in the House in testimony to a woman who has been described by her son John as among the finest of her generation. Sadly, Florence Honderich, mother of Mary, David and John Honderich and an early supporter of the David Suzuki Foundation and Lester B. Pearson United World College of the Pacific, passed away recently after a brief illness.

Her service through numerous philanthropies, foundations and her church, Bedford Park United, was exceptional. As David Suzuki said:

It is the incredible generosity of people like Florence that continue to seed the missions of small but essential local charities and groups across the country. Without this crucial support, our communities and lives would not be nearly as rich.

Equally profound was her devotion to her family. In the words of her son John, "she was incredibly loyal and supportive of her children".

I am certain all members of the House will join with me in saluting this remarkable woman, Florence Honderich, and express our sympathy on behalf of all Canadians to her family.

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*[Translation]***ÉTIENNE COUSINEAU**

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Étienne Cousineau, a young soprano from my riding, earned top honours at his first participation at the international operetta and musical theatre contest, which is organized each year by the City of Marseille. Fifty participants from a large number of countries took part in that contest, including three Quebecers.

Étienne is also actively involved in a number of Laval organizations, including Les Pieds légers, the Maison de ballet-

théâtre Reflet, the Théâtre d'art lyrique de Laval, the Opéra bouffe du Québec and Fantasia. He also created his own theatre company, the Productions Belle Lurette, of which he is the musical director, director and choreographer.

Étienne Cousineau definitely deserves our admiration, and my Bloc Québécois colleagues are joining me in congratulating him.

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*[English]***WINDSOR SPITFIRES**

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is once again my pleasure to rise in the House to congratulate the Windsor Spitfires for successfully defending their 2009 OHL championship by sweeping the Barrie Colts out of the playoffs last week, thereby earning the title of 2010 OHL champs.

Now the Spits are back-to-back Robertson Cup champions and they have earned the right to return to the Memorial Cup, where they will have an opportunity to defend their 2009 Memorial Cup championship. This rare feat is the result of a collective effort that has galvanized the community behind a tremendous ownership group whose intelligence, vision and commitment has inspired us all. This team has overcome too many obstacles to list here, but its achievements are nothing short of remarkable.

I want to congratulate the entire Spits organization for representing our community with distinction. I wish them all the best of luck in their ongoing battle to repeat as Canada's junior hockey champions at the Memorial Cup. Go Spits go.

* * *

● (1405)

UKRAINIAN CONSTITUTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 300th anniversary of the Ukrainian Constitution, written in 1710 by Pylyp Orlyk, diplomat, Hetman in exile and protector of Ukraine. This constitution was the first document in the world to establish a democratic standard for the separation of powers in government between the legislative, executive and judiciary branches.

This constitution also limited the executive authority and established a Cossack parliament called the General Council that was democratically elected every three years. Predating the American constitution of 1777 by over 65 years, the Orlyk constitution testifies to the long-standing traditions of democracy in Ukraine. This constitution is filled with a democratic spirit that makes it one of the most interesting documents of political thought.

I invite all members of the House to join me and the Ukrainian ambassador tonight at 6:30 in the Speaker's salon to celebrate this important anniversary.

VOLUNTEERISM

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to bring to the attention of this House the volunteer work of Ms. Vera Sherlock, a member of the Royal Canadian Legion, Chapter 212 of LaSalle.

Ms. Vera Sherlock has dedicated her talent and energy to better the lives of our Canadian war veterans for over 35 years. Members of the LaSalle Legion are amazed by her never-ending will to make a difference in the lives of our Canadian veterans.

Every month she makes her anticipated visit at Ste. Anne's Hospital. She brings hospitalized veterans all kinds of little surprises and warm affection that puts smiles on their faces, and brings out a little sunshine in their lives.

She organizes parties and entertains them during special holidays. December must be her favourite month because she goes all out for a special Christmas party for the veterans to bring them the special joy of the season at a time of year that is especially difficult for them.

On behalf of my constituents of LaSalle—Émard, I want to thank Vera for her involvement with our veterans who have given so much to our country.

* * *

DOWN'S SYNDROME

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this weekend Saskatchewan will welcome the Canadian Down Syndrome Society's national conference to Regina. The Canadian Down Syndrome Society works to ensure equitable treatment for the 35,000 Canadians who have Down's syndrome.

Today, Canadians with Down's syndrome work, receive post-secondary education, pay taxes, and get married. Yet unfortunately, certain negative perceptions of Canadians with Down's syndrome still exist.

Some parents are told "our school doesn't do Down's" when they try to enrol their child. Some doctors assume that no family would want a child with Down's when they outline medical options to perspective parents.

That these discriminatory attitudes are still publicly voiced disturbs me, and should disturb all Canadians.

Canadians with Down's syndrome face more medical challenges than most other Canadians, but discrimination against them and their families should not be tolerated.

We as a society, as individuals, organizations, and governments need to do what we can to educate our fellow Canadians about Down's syndrome, and to encourage policies that provide support to Canadians who deal with this medical challenge.

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[Translation]

JEUNE CHAMBRE DE COMMERCE DE RIMOUSKI

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to acknowledge the exceptional work of the Jeune Chambre de commerce de

Statements by Members

Rimouski which, year after year, contributes to the region's economic and social development.

I particularly want to highlight the determination of its board of directors and the indomitable will of its chairman, Jérôme Dufour Gallant. The support that these young people provide to the community is very much appreciated.

I am also taking this opportunity to express my heartfelt congratulations to Jean-François Ouellet who, on Saturday, won the Jeune Chambre de Rimouski's young personality award for professionals. Mr. Ouellet, who is the director of investments at Desjardins Capital de risque, is actively involved in regional and community development, which is certainly to his credit. In addition to Mr. Ouellet, I should mention the nominations of Étienne Bélanger, Annick Dionne, Jonathan Proulx and Karl-Hugo Pelletier, who also help making our region a more thriving and prosperous community.

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BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have recently seen how much contempt the members of the Bloc have for federalist Quebecers. The expression "token Quebecers" shows contempt for more than 60% of Quebecers.

After being in this House for 20 years, aside from being disrespectful to Quebecers, I really wonder what the Bloc has done to defend Quebec. One thing is certain, since the dawn of time, the Bloc has voted against all the initiatives that would move Quebec forward.

The Bloc Québécois can be disrespectful to us, but the truth is that the elected Conservatives from Quebec are serving Quebecers.

Quebeckers can count on our Conservative government to deliver the goods. I am proud to be both a Quebecer and a federalist, and I am no less a Quebecer because of that.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, eight months since the Toyota recalls began, Canadians are still looking for action from the Conservative government.

While the U.S. is acting swiftly to punish offences and rectify legislative shortcomings, the Minister of Transport has not even left the starting gate.

Worse, the U.S. action against Toyota relied in part on Canadian documentation, which our government does not seem able to obtain.

A paper trail from Transport Canada confirms that as the minister was publicly praising Toyota, his departmental employees were pleading for action against the company. They also reveal that Transport Canada received dozens of sudden acceleration complaints but investigated only a few.

Statements by Members

In Canada, the Minister of Transport's wilfully negligent approach allows for potential property damage and personal injuries to accumulate.

Perhaps the Minister of Transport should spend less time practising his question period performances and a bit more time focusing on his responsibilities to protect Canadian drivers.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I bring a matter of grave concern to the attention of the House. The Liberal public safety critic, the member for Ajax—Pickering, has suggested that a future Liberal government might dramatically reduce criminal sentences. He refused to rule out revisiting our Conservative government's decision to end the ridiculous practice of giving criminals double, or sometimes triple, credit for time served in pre-trial custody.

When will the Liberal Party come clean on its plans? Either it continually stands with criminals instead of standing behind victims. It should start listening to Canadians who thought this practice was wrong. In fact, the provinces and the police supported our efforts to end credit for time served.

We stand with victims and Canadians who are concerned about crime. The Liberals continue to demonstrate that they are not serious about getting tough on crime. They are not in it for Canadians; they are in it for themselves.

* * *

BERTHA ALLEN

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honour the memory of an outstanding woman, Bertha Allen of Inuvik.

Bertha Allen died Friday, at the age of 76, a respected northern leader, a Gwich'in, who balanced so well modern and traditional society. Born in Old Crow, Yukon, Allen lived most of her life in the Mackenzie Delta.

Last year, the Governor General awarded her the northern medal for her leadership in support of equality for aboriginal and northern women. Allen was named to the Order of Canada in 2007. In the late 1970s, she helped found the Native Women's Association of the Northwest Territories and became its first president.

She later served as president of the Native Women's Association of Canada. She was also president of the advisory council for the NWT Status of Women Council, and she encouraged many women to get into politics.

Bertha was a dear friend to so many people, myself included. Her spirit and her wisdom will be missed.

* * *

PARDONS FOR SERIOUS CRIMES

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is continuing to put public safety and the rights of victims before those of criminals. The pardon of Graham

James illustrated that more must be done to safeguard the public and the integrity of the pardon system.

The current system of pardons implies that serious crimes are somehow forgiven and that the harm done by offenders somehow disappears.

Victims disagree. So does our government and we have acted.

Earlier today, the eliminating pardons for serious crimes act was tabled in this House. These changes would ensure that the National Parole Board has the tools and discretion it needs to ensure that public safety and compassion for victims are always placed first. Most important, no longer would those convicted of serious sexual offences against our children be excused by a pardon.

I call on all members of this House to support Bill C-23.

* * *

● (1415)

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC FAMILY WEEK

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize Quebec Family Week and honour the extraordinary dedication of parents.

With the theme "Pour un Québec Famille", which means "for a family oriented Quebec", this week highlights the importance and support we must give families. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate us, Quebecers, for having the best family policies in North America.

The family is at the heart of our lives. It is our wealth and our future. To all organizations, teachers, educators, doctors, as well as all other professionals and volunteers who support and promote our families, thank you.

I encourage all the people of the riding of Saint-Lambert to participate in the activities related to the International Day of Families, on May 15, especially by participating in the activity "Attention! Family in Action!" in Longueuil, an activity meant to recognize and promote precious family time.

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GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two years ago, the Conservatives' decision to slash funding for culture was diametrically opposed to Quebec values. This week they are starting all over again by cutting \$1.5 million in funding for the FrancoFolies de Montreal festival.

Oral Questions

They must really not understand Quebec at all if they are making cuts to FrancoFolies, an international gathering with extensive spinoffs that helps promote Quebec's culture internationally. It also encourages artistic exchanges among francophones from around the world. It is by far the largest francophone music festival in North America, and that is what they are cutting.

The same day, the Conservatives also cut funding for Toronto's Gay Pride Festival. The week before, they cut funding to women's groups.

No one is safe from Conservative strong-arm tactics.

The Prime Minister is attacking our artists, our festivals, francophones, women and the gay community. One cannot help but wonder who will be next.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government firmly believes that low taxes fuel job creation and economic growth. That is why, since forming government, we have cut taxes for families, seniors, students and businesses.

Canada's economic action plan is working. Last week, Statistics Canada reported that a record 108,700 new jobs were created in April. This is the largest monthly job gain on record.

In fact, since July of last year, Canada has created some 285,000 new jobs. No wonder the latest edition of *The Economist* magazine calls Canada "an economic star".

While jobs and growth remain our government's top priority, the Liberal leader is intent on stopping Canada's recovery in its tracks with a hike to job-killing business taxes, a higher GST, and the introduction of a carbon tax.

Simply put, Canada cannot afford the Liberal leader's tax and spend approach, a plan that will kill jobs, put the brakes on our economic recovery, and set Canadians back.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has expedited the processing of Beaufort Sea exploration licences. In response, the oil companies involved asked the government for an environmental protection plan that has yet to be developed. BP and Imperial Oil have recognized that it was crucial that Canadian standards not be weakened. Unlike the United States, Canada does not require any environmental assessment to be carried out at the exploration and licensing stages.

Why do the Conservatives keep refusing to produce an environmental protection plan?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, Canada has an exceptional regulatory agency in the form of the National Energy Board.

We have been very clear. The government has been clear and the National Energy Board has been clear that no drilling will take place in Canada unless the environment is protected and public safety is protected. We have an extraordinary record as a country, and we will continue to proceed on that basis.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in December offshore drilling regulations were deliberately weakened to allow oil companies to set their own environmental protection goals and safety standards.

In contrast to the United States' using a strict and prescriptive approach for every offshore platform, the Conservatives do not even require safety valves and blowout preventers. What this really means is that the Conservatives are asking industry to put the public interest ahead of their self-interest and shareholder profits.

Will the government reinstate tough regulations that hold oil companies to the highest standards or not?

● (1420)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Canadian regulations require companies to prove they can operate safely in specific situations using the most advanced technology tailored to their circumstances.

We have stringent regulations that put the onus on industries to prove to regulators that they can protect their workers, the public and the environment. No drilling will proceed unless the government is convinced, period. Canadians expect nothing less.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, instead of reading his notes, why did the minister not explain why the government weakened the requirements?

The Prime Minister said the Gulf of Mexico spill is "a horrific environmental catastrophe".

When asked why he placed Canada's pristine Arctic environment at risk because he had no plan, he said, "There are rules for relief wells". BP's chief operating officer says the relief well will take 70 or 80 days more. If the Prime Minister says two weeks is a horrific environmental disaster, what would our pristine Arctic look like after a three-month wait for the Prime Minister's relief well?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, instead of looking at his notes while I answer, he should listen to my answer.

Oral Questions

Canadian regulations require operators to employ the best technology, equipment and training techniques available, and we will not accept any weakening of these requirements. No drilling will proceed until this government is convinced that the safety of the workers and the environment is protected. Canadians expect nothing less.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week in light of the environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, I asked if the government would respect the 1972 moratorium banning oil tanker traffic from B.C.'s Pacific north coast, and I got no answer.

We know a major crude oil spill off B.C.'s coastline would be catastrophic. Yesterday I returned from New Orleans where I saw firsthand the devastation that region is facing.

I ask again, will the government finally promise to respect the Pacific coast oil tanker ban, yes or no?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has been very clear from the beginning.

We expect Canada's regulators to enforce this country's strong environmental standards, including our offshore drilling safety region.

Let me be clear. There will be no drilling until we are convinced that the safety of the workers and the environment is protected, period.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government repeats the refrain that the chance of a serious accident ever happening in Newfoundland's offshore is zero because of established protocols, but yet sadly, we still remember the empty promise about how the Ocean Ranger was unsinkable and how Cougar helicopter operators were under the most stringent safety protocol in the world.

Disasters happen. They happen here at home. Does the government understand that having no backup rig is an irresponsible roll of the dice for the Canadian offshore? Does it accept that accepting an 11-day response time to a disaster is an irresponsible move for each and every one of us as Canadians?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all recall the tragic circumstances of the Ocean Ranger. In addition, I would say that we all, as Canadians, are watching what is happening in the Gulf of Mexico and we are appalled and horrified by what is happening there.

I point out, however, that the regulatory framework that applies in Canada is quite different. Perhaps the hon. member should pay some regard to what is happening, even today, when the United States is making an announcement that it will break up the responsibility in the United States to follow a regulatory regime that is in fact very close to what Canada has with the National Energy Board.

* * *

[Translation]

SECURITIES

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, a coalition of Quebec's business community, unions and even Quebec's finance minister denounced the creation of a

Canada-wide securities commission. Their message is clear: if this commission sees the light of day, there will be job losses in Quebec and decision-making power will shift to Toronto.

Why is the Prime Minister insisting on moving forward with this plan and ignoring the OECD, which says the current system is working quite well?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is true that the provinces have most of the jurisdiction over this. Some provinces, including Quebec, have decided not to take part, but other provinces have decided to contribute to the creation of a national securities commission. That is their right, and we are working closely with those provinces.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's finance minister says that creating a Canada-wide commission will be disastrous for Quebec's economy. According to him, it will provide an additional incentive for international corporations to set up their head offices in Toronto.

Will the Prime Minister face the facts and scrap his plan for a Canada-wide securities commission?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no decision has been made on setting up the commission's head office in Toronto. As I have said, effective financial regulatory reform is being discussed worldwide. We must follow suit in Canada. Nonetheless, Quebec is entitled to opt out. The other provinces have the right to take part in this, and we will work with them.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Jean Coutu, Pierre-Karl Péladeau, the Lemaire family, unions, chambers of commerce, notaries, lawyers, the Barreau du Québec and the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec oppose the dismantling of the AMF and the creation of a Toronto securities commission. The Quebec finance minister is afraid that there will be an exodus to Toronto. The Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec said that the federal project is "dubious, prejudicial and harmful to Quebec."

Why are the Conservative members from Quebec bent on destroying the financial autonomy of Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is the only major industrialized country in the world without a common or national securities regulator. We cannot afford to wait endlessly, in order to better protect investors, to enhance enforcement, to strengthen our response to financial instability, to reduce unnecessary costs, to attract new international investments.

Oral Questions

The studies on jobs show that the gain would be about \$10 billion a year in economic output and 65,000 jobs gained with a Canadian securities regulator.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what he is quoting is not even a study.

The federal government is lying about cost savings with a single regulator. The Quebec finance minister has said that maintaining a new entity and operating regional centres would not cost less. The federal government has also wasted more than \$300 million on its administrative monster.

Why are Quebec members refusing to admit that the dismantling of the AMF is a waste of human and financial resources, and that it is harmful to Quebec?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is because we need to do a better job to protect investors. We need to do a better job on enforcement.

The hon. member should look at what happened to the victims of Earl Jones in Quebec. Look what the Earl Jones committee says. It says, “We...support the idea of a single national regulatory body overseeing financial organizations...”. That is what the OECD says as well.

If we want to protect investors, if we want to enforce regulations, we need a large, strong investigative branch across Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the risks of an oil spill in Canada, can the Prime Minister tell us what action the government has taken since the oil rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico?

What have they done to strengthen Canadian rules and standards? What have they done to reassess the risks?

Or is the government going to say that everything is all right and that, despite the disaster, it will never happen in Canada?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board is responsible for regulating the industry and it has a very good record. I am certain that it will apply what it has learned from the events in the U.S. to make improvements.

[*English*]

The National Energy Board has an excellent record in terms of regulating these things. We do not have the kind of environmental catastrophe we see in the United States. Quite frankly, I am shocked to hear some of the opposition members suggesting we would copy American regulations. We are doing it right in this country. We have confidence in the National Energy Board.

• (1430)

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just contradicted his own minister.

Let us look at the National Energy Board for a minute. This is an industry-friendly body that very recently gave in to pressure from the big oil companies to relax the regulations, to loosen the regulations on drilling in the Beaufort Sea. Essentially the companies now get to decide what technologies they use, what systems they bring forward, what plans they have. There is no regulation of any serious nature left.

Can the Prime Minister explain to Canadians what the Conservatives are doing to toughen up the rules, not loosen them?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I am fascinated that a series of disgraceful events in the United States is used as a platform to attack a Canadian regulator, a Canadian regulator that has an excellent record, a Canadian regulator that responds to these situations and that will continue to improve the situation here in Canada. We are very proud of the job our regulator and this country are doing. We have nothing to learn from the United States.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Chevron is charging ahead with drilling one of the deepest wells ever off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. Now the environmental assessment for that Chevron drilling says that the risk of a blowout is about 1 in 3,600. That number was calculated before the BP blowout and it was based on the relative infrequency of any of these catastrophes up until now. I can of course understand the Conservatives do not like environmental assessments and that is why they want the NEB to do the work, but what has the government done to update the risk of these massive drilling projects?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, the record of the National Energy Board as a regulator is stellar. Of course the National Energy Board, as a consequence of this action, a consequence of its ongoing work, will continually examine the regulatory environment and see if improvements have to be made. But to try to turn this, as the NDP is doing and the opposition is doing, into an attack on Canada, into an attack on a Canadian regulator, is without any foundation in fact.

* * *

PENSIONS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has a clear path before it on pensions, but it continues to mount unnecessary obstacles. Fifteen months ago, it promised to move forward with changes to federal pensions by the end of 2009, but it has done nothing but talk.

Oral Questions

Meanwhile, the provinces and territories are ready to move forward with a plan for a supplementary Canada pension plan. Will the Conservatives finally accept this proposal and get Canadian pensioners the help they need before the summer arrives?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are listening to Canadians and so are seven other provincial and territorial governments in Canada. We agreed as finance ministers that we would listen carefully, consult carefully.

The first rule has to be with respect to the Canada pension plan, a remarkable success story as a public pension plan, that we do no harm. We are making sure, first of all, that we do no harm. We are co-operating with the provinces and territories. The federation is working well on pension reform.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the Conservatives are unwilling to work proactively on this, there is something even easier for them to do. Right now in the Senate there is a bill that would immediately help thousands of pensioners who rely on long-term disability pension benefits, many of which have disappeared because of bankruptcies. The Conservatives could allow quick passage of the bill and it could be law by the end of the week. What is stopping them? Why do they not want to help thousands of pensioners?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that this is a complex issue but we are seized of the issue. We are carefully studying the issue with our friends in the provinces and the territories. As the Minister of Finance has realized, there are several bills in this place. Some of them are relevant, and some have some problems with them. We are studying all of these bills and we will do the best thing for the people of Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals believe in competitive corporate tax rates, but not when these tax cuts would increase public debt. The crisis in Europe has shown everyone what can happen when public debt gets out of control.

Why do the Conservatives insist on cutting corporate taxes, when this will increase our public debt by \$20 billion in four years?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been working hard, in co-operation with most of the provinces and territories, to reduce the federal corporate tax, which was a little above 22% when our government came to office, to about 15% by 2012. We asked the provinces to move in the same direction to get their corporate taxes, those that have them, down to about 10% in the same time frame. It looks like the majority of the provinces will be there.

This is an incredible opportunity to brand our country as a country that does business taxes at about 25%. Overall, it adds to our advantage with respect to financial institutions. This is Canada's

moment to take these kinds of steps to improve our standard of living.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the middle of the 1990s, Jean Chrétien inherited a \$42 billion Conservative deficit and an overall government debt burden equal to that of Greece. He and Paul Martin massively paid down debt, delaying tax cuts until the books were balanced.

Why, in the middle of a global debt crisis, do Conservatives insist on corporate tax cuts paid for with borrowed money?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Finance has the floor.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was living in Canada in the middle of the 1990s and I was in a provincial government then. I know how the former prime minister balanced the budget: on the backs of nurses, teachers, school children and people needing social services in the provinces. That is the Liberal way but that is not our way.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government's refusal to fund abortions abroad is jeopardizing the health of women, particularly in Africa, where nearly 5.6 million unsafe abortions are carried out every year. According to the prestigious scientific journal *The Lancet*, 50% of maternal deaths are in sub-Saharan Africa.

When will this government admit that its backwards ideology is jeopardizing women's health?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have told the House and all Canadians, the Canadian G8 initiative is about saving the lives of mothers and children. Over 350,000 women will die giving birth. We can address this by ensuring they have trained health attendants at the delivery and the proper antibiotics, vaccinations and a clean environment.

Those are all things that all G8 countries know we can do. They are inexpensive. That is why we will make a difference with Canada hosting the G8 this year.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, John Kirton, the director of the G8 Research Group at the University of Toronto, has criticized the fact that with just seven weeks to go until the G8, the Conservative government's signature campaign, maternal health, is so vague that there are doubts it will ever be meaningful. No funding target has been set, and no structure for the funding has been made public.

Does this not prove that the government has completely discredited itself by isolating itself on the abortion issue?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the G8 countries all agree, as do many other experts, that Canada's interventions are good and relate well to the MDGs. They say that the Canadian strategy is well-grounded and that it is the right way to go. These experts are the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, the Canadian Nurses Association, the College of Family Physicians of Canada, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, UNICEF Canada and the Canadian Association of Midwives. They all support Canada's initiative.

* * *

• (1440)

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in terms of administration of justice, the Conservatives do not understand that the rights of citizens in the legal system must come before the right of justices to impose their unilingualism. By insisting that it is not important for Supreme Court justices to be bilingual, they are defending the careers of unilingual candidates instead of citizens' rights.

Does the Minister of Justice realize how ludicrous it is to defend the careers of unilingual anglophones instead of the right of citizens to use the official language of their choice?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely ridiculous. I did answer that question yesterday.

What has not been answered is the Bloc's problem with standing up and fighting crime in this country. We have introduced legislation to crack down on drug dealers, individuals who traffic in children and white collar criminals. What is its problem? Why is it impossible for the Bloc to stand up for victims and law-abiding citizens? Could he answer that question?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not the one answering the questions here.

Numerous support positions at the Supreme Court require bilingualism. If a receptionist working at the Supreme Court has to be bilingual, why do the justices sitting on the bench of the highest court of a supposedly bilingual country not have to understand French as well? Should they not follow the example set by, say, the Governor General, the current Prime Minister and by you, Mr. Speaker?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member says that he does not want to answer that question. Maybe he will get up and apologize.

Oral Questions

I want the member to know how offended I was by his attack on my Quebec colleagues last week. I want him to know that my Quebec colleagues and their families have been good and loyal supporters of Quebec for 400 years.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, initial reports suggested that the RCMP would not be investigating the biggest mortgage fraud in Canadian history. Now we know that RCMP investigators have been inundated with tens of thousands of documents, so it may take months before they can wade through them to decide if an investigation is warranted.

Why is the government not giving the RCMP the resources it needs to get to the bottom of this right away?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nobody has been more supportive of law enforcement agencies in this country than this particular government.

If the member wants to talk about mortgage fraud, he should have a look at our bill on white collar crime. It zeroes in on the individuals who commit this kind of fraud and would ensure they get mandatory sentencing and, for a change, we have made it user friendly for the victims of those frauds. That should have the support of the hon. member and all hon. members of this House.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is all about enforcement.

This unprecedented fraud shows the government's upside-down thinking and its pattern of superficial responses to white collar crime. The Conservatives brag like gunslingers about being tough on crime but their white collar crime policies are mere sleight of hand; ephemeral pronouncements with no effective action.

It is the biggest mortgage fraud in Canadian history and the RCMP does not even have the wherewithal to begin sifting through piles of documents to determine if there was illegal activity.

When will the Conservatives give the police what they really need to fight white collar crime and spare us the incessant public relations?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not quite sure why the hon. member is now attacking the RCMP, but if he is serious about attacking mortgage fraud and white collar crime, for a change they on that side of the House should start making it a priority.

At their recent spenders conference, we never heard one word from the Liberals about fighting crime in this country. That is why I am so proud to be a part of a party that will always stand up for victims and law-abiding Canadians.

Oral Questions

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is nothing but more rhetoric. In fact, the only action the government has taken on white collar crime is to starve the RCMP and the Department of Justice of resources they desperately need to do their jobs. Underfunding of the RCMP commercial crime unit is crippling the department. Federal prosecutors are being driven out the door by cuts and the scant resources left are totally inadequate.

Why is the government undercutting the people and departments that fight white collar crime? Why is there such a massive gap between its words and its actions?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the answer that the Minister of Justice gave to the prior questioner and I agree with that position.

What I do not understand is why that individual simply refuses to stand up for the victims of white collar crime. I remember when that party voted against Bill C-9 to stop house arrest for people involved in fraud. Those members voted against it and now they have flipped sides. Why is that? Why are they not consistently on the side of victims?

• (1445)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that minister should stop abusing victims and actually stand up for them.

The reality is that the Conservatives cut 41% from the victims of crime initiative. They tossed the victims ombudsman out the door when he said that their plan was unbalanced and would not work. Now they are chasing failed Republican policies to build prison cities. The government starves departments that catch large scale fraud and cripples them from going after scams like what happened with BMO in Alberta.

Why does the government undermine those who stop serious white collar crime?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the kind of prison cities that the Liberals build are for ordinary citizens to be barred in their own homes because they are scared to be out on the streets. Our government believes that it is criminals who should be behind bars and ordinary citizens entitled to walk the streets when they feel like it.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are outraged that serious crimes are excused through pardons. Under the current system, pardons are granted almost immediately. This Conservative government believes that no matter how much time passes, a serious crime is a serious crime.

Today, legislation was tabled to ensure that those convicted of sexual offences against minors would be ineligible for a pardon.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please update this House on how this important piece of legislation would further ensure that the rights of law-abiding citizens always come before the rights of criminals?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his very hard work on this important file.

The current system of pardon applies that the crimes committed by offenders are somehow forgiven or that the harm they have done has somehow disappeared. The vast majority of Canadians disagree and so does our Conservative government.

We are taking the steps needed to eliminate pardons for those convicted of sexual assault against children. The changes we are proposing are tough, yet fair. I urge all members to support our bill.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when one member of the Conservative caucus is implicated in a massive real estate fraud there is not a peep from the PMO and yet the member for Simcoe—Grey, who was accused of absolutely nothing, is dumped from the party, kicked out of caucus and turned in to the RCMP. It is a fundamental principle of natural justice that a person has a right to know what they are accused of.

What could the member for Simcoe—Grey possibly have done that is more embarrassing to the Conservative government than being implicated in a massive real estate fraud scheme?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have referred allegations of a serious nature, which came from a third party, regarding the member for Simcoe—Grey, to the relevant authorities and to the member for Simcoe—Grey. These authorities will come to their own conclusions.

We believe that it is important to underline the fact that none of these allegations involved any government business, any member of Parliament, any senator or any government employee.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the relevant authorities, the RCMP, the Ethics Commissioner and the Conservative Party's own lawyer, now say that no documents were ever given to them. Surely the Prime Minister had some concrete proof before he crucified his minister for the status of women.

Could he please tell us what, if any, documents were actually passed to the relevant authorities regarding the member for Simcoe—Grey, or did he decide to ruin her life based on the unsubstantiated allegations of one discredited and dubious gumshoe?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this certainly was not the attitude from members of the New Democratic Party when we were last in session and that minister was on her feet answering questions.

Here is the bottom line. Serious allegations were brought to the attention of the government. We cannot take a position as to whether they are true or untrue. The Prime Minister did the right thing. He immediately forwarded those allegations to the relevant authorities and ensured that the member was made aware.

* * *

[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, EDC's vice-president contradicted the Minister of State responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec when he recognized that EDC does not really offer direct assistance to forestry companies. Indeed, instead of the \$22 billion mentioned by the government, EDC may have provided at most \$500 million annually to forestry companies across Canada. This is far from the \$10 billion given to the automotive industry.

When will the minister stop playing with words, and when will he provide loan guarantees, as requested by Quebec's forestry sector?

• (1450)

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to reply to the member and to clarify things once again. EDC's vice-president responded to a question on loan guarantees. We have always talked about the financial services provided, which include accounts receivable insurance. As I already mentioned, that insurance accounts for 90% of EDC's support.

One should listen carefully. I have EDC's numbers before me. In 2008, it was \$13.9 billion. We are talking about financial services provided to the Canadian forestry industry, including \$8.9 billion in Quebec. We are not talking about loan guarantees.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the president of the Quebec Forest Industry Council is exasperated by the government's attitude. He is asking to stop saying that help is being provided, because that is not the case. The fact is that forestry companies do not have access to EDC's help.

Instead of covering the Conservative government's inaction, why do the ministers from Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean not focus their efforts on getting loan guarantees for the forestry industry?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, in Abitibi, the regional director of Emploi-Québec and the director of the sectoral manpower centre said that the industry needed to diversify the products that it processes, improve marketing strategies and develop new markets.

Last week, in the Lower St. Lawrence region, they said, following a seminar, that the U.S. housing market recovery was a sign of better things to come and that the resurgence of markets would be beneficial. Bloc members are the only ones who do not understand. The problem with the forestry industry is that it sells less products. We are hoping that a new window of opportunity will help us sell more products.

Oral Questions

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month when the Prime Minister fired his minister, kicked her out of caucus and called in the RCMP, his spokesperson told the media that she was informed of the allegations. He said that the Conservative Party lawyers spoke to her last Friday and informed her of the allegations. However, last night the former minister stated that she has been kept in the dark.

Not the Prime Minister, not the party lawyer, no one has provided her with any information. Did the Prime Minister's spokesperson misspeak?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think I addressed that question when I responded to the member for Winnipeg Centre. I can say this. We are tremendously concerned that a Liberal member of Parliament, a sitting member of the Liberal caucus, was advertising services as a paid lobbyist on the World Wide Web.

Instead of full disclosure, the website was altered before the Ethics Commissioner was called in and altered after the Ethics Commissioner was informed. Now it has been completely removed from the Internet. Is this an example of another Liberal cover-up of a scandal?

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he should provide a better answer.

It has now been over a month since the Prime Minister was seemingly informed of such serious allegations that he had to refer his minister's case to the RCMP, which is a first since the Mulroney years.

However, neither the former minister nor Canadians know whether the RCMP is investigating.

It is the government's integrity that is at stake here. When will the Prime Minister tell Canadians whether or not an investigation is underway. If so, what is the object of that investigation?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not going to speak for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. What I can do is speak as a member of the House of Commons.

Why did the Liberal leader appoint a senior member of his caucus to the most important regulatory oversight committee, a man who is advertising himself as a paid lobbyist for foreign interests, specifically saying that he could get regulations changed?

Why would the Liberal leader make this appointment? Why will he not explain just who the member's clients were and what conflict of interest could have taken place on this matter?

*Oral Questions***BROADBAND ACCESS**

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives came to power, Canada was the world leader in broadband access. Under this government we have fallen to the back of the pack of OECD countries. No wonder, because after ragging the puck for four years, the Minister of Industry kicked off a digital consultation by announcing that two, count them, just two projects in northern Ontario would receive funding for broadband upgrades. No wonder we have fallen off the digital map.

The government had four years to upgrade our rural broadband infrastructure. Why has it been missing in action?

• (1455)

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): It is quite the opposite in fact, Mr. Speaker. I was happy to announce on Mother's Day the first 52 projects as part of our \$200 million broadband strategy, the first 52. Two are in northern Ontario, as the hon. member said. There are projects throughout nine other provinces and territories. That is just a start, because other announcements will be coming forward in the next few weeks.

I do not know why the hon. member is asking the question. He voted against that. He voted against our budget. Why is he standing here saying he is the king of broadband now?

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COPYRIGHT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly proud to vote against any initiative that is brought out by the flat earth society.

Let us look at the issue of copyright. Under the last copyright bill, the government particularly focused on attacking long-distance education by forcing teachers and students to destroy their class notes at the end of every semester. Criminalizing students might be a Tory strategy, but it is not a digital strategy.

With round two of copyright under way, will the government continue its practice of targeting students, educators, innovators, consumers and artists?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, we are in the midst of drafting a bill that will be put forward in the House in this session. I encourage the hon. member to wait until the bill is presented before he critiques it.

The hon. member has been out on these issues already. He is the guy who proposed the tax for iPods, for MP3s, for BlackBerry devices. That is his solution. That is not our solution.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the member for Ajax—Pickering mused that a future Liberal government might dramatically reduce criminal sentences.

It is no surprise the Liberals are not being straight with Canadians. When they thought that nobody was watching, the Liberals tried to gut our truth in sentencing legislation in the Senate. Liberals apparently want dangerous criminals to get out of jail more quickly.

The Liberals are not in it for Canadians. They are obviously just in it for themselves.

Could the Minister of Public Safety inform the House how the government will continue to stand with victims and all Canadians?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his support and hard work on behalf of victims.

We acknowledge that we have a fundamental difference of opinion compared to the Liberal Party and the member for Ajax—Pickering when it comes to criminal justice and public safety.

We do not think that criminals should be paroled after serving one-sixth of their sentence. We think it is wrong that arsonists are allowed to serve their sentence in the comfort of their own homes after they have burned other homes down. We think it is wrong that pardons are granted almost automatically.

Canadians can be assured that the Conservative Party and this government will stand up for victims.

* * *

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, residents in my riding of Davenport and other nearby Toronto ridings are facing the prospect of hundreds of additional diesel trains passing close to their homes and through their neighbourhoods to facilitate a rail link to the airport from downtown Toronto.

With electric trains being used all over the world, will the minister indicate what the government is prepared to do to assist public transit agencies to convert those rail lines to accommodate electric trains?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the interest of the member opposite on this important file.

I did recently sit down with a group of community activists led by Peggy Nash about this important issue. We listened to the health concerns and environmental concerns the people in that community have. This issue will ultimately be decided by the Government of Ontario. Obviously we will work together with them to establish priorities on how we might best serve the needs of public transit and getting people around the city and region of Toronto.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Industry Canada changed the festival funding rules without notice, thereby threatening the financial stability of FrancoFolies de Montréal just a month before the event. The shortfall is expected to be \$1.5 million. Alain Simard, chair of the FrancoFolies, is urging the Minister of Canadian Heritage to intervene and provide immediate financial assistance so that the festival does not have to cancel a number of contracts.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage intervene and provide an immediate solution to the problem created by his Industry Canada colleague, or could he not care less?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that our government is investing more money in festivals and artists than any other government in Canada's history. FrancoFolies in particular will be receiving \$175,000 both this year and next, for a total of \$350,000. We said yes to Mr. Simard. We will be investing in this major festival.

* * *

• (1500)

[English]

CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, parents across the country are checking their medicine cabinets this week and dealing with the latest product recall. This time it is a children's pain reliever.

The recall by Johnson & Johnson is another example of how lax regulation can lead to dangerous consequences. Canada has abysmal product safety laws. It is time that the government stepped up. Voluntary recalls are not enough.

When will the government get serious about protecting Canadians from dangerous tainted products?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has shown an unprecedented commitment to the health and safety of Canadians, including providing nearly half a billion dollars over five years for the consumer safety action plan. Improved consumer product safety legislation will be an important part of this action.

We are continuing to work hard to ensure unsafe products do not harm Canadians.

* * *

SPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has long been a world leader in the space industry and this government has maintained its commitment to the program.

Last year we saw Dr. Thirsk and Dr. Payette providing expertise and leadership aboard the international space station, essential components of which were manufactured in Canada by MacDonald, Dettwiler and Associates Ltd.

This year's budget committed \$397 million to develop the RADARSAT Constellation mission.

Would the Minister of Industry inform the House of the crucial work that is being done by our Canadian Space Agency?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is indeed right. The budget did commit \$397 million to develop the RADARSAT Constellation mission to continue the legacy in space that Canada has.

One of the astronauts who has done most particularly well is Dr. Robert Thirsk, the first Canadian to launch aboard a Russian Soyuz capsule and play an integral role on a six-month expedition at the international space station. With this mission he has surpassed the total number of days in space of all the other Canadian astronauts combined.

It is my pleasure to recognize the great accomplishments of Dr. Thirsk, a true Canadian hero.

* * *

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, electric trains are the logical solution. People in the GTA are worried about how more diesel trains might affect their lives. This is not new technology, either. Electric trains are already used across Europe with great success.

I ask again, what is the minister and the government prepared to do to help Torontonians and the environment? Why are they not prepared to assist public transit agencies like Metrolinx electrify trains along this corridor?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the long-standing interest of my colleague from Davenport on this issue.

We worked constructively with the Province of Ontario and asked what its priorities were for federal investment. The province said it wanted us to invest in the Spadina subway extension. Done. It said it wanted us to invest in the Scarborough LRT. Done. It said it wanted us to make major investments in GO Transit. Done. It wanted us to get the job done in helping refurbish and expand Union Station in Toronto. Done.

We have had record investments in public transit and we have done it all in co-operation with Toronto and the Province of Ontario.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order. I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mr. Lu Yongxiang, Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Speaker's Ruling

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of crew members of Mission Expedition 20/21: Koichi Wakata, a Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut; Frank DeWinne, a European Space Agency astronaut; and Canada's own Robert Thirsk, a Canadian Space Agency astronaut.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

• (1505)

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

ADMISSIBILITY OF AMENDMENTS TO BILL C-3—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons on April 29, 2010 concerning amendments contained in the report from the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development on Bill C-3, An Act to promote gender equity in Indian registration by responding to the Court of Appeal for British Columbia decision in *McIvor v. Canada* (Registrar of Indian and Northern Affairs).

[English]

I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for having raised this important matter as well as the hon. members for Labrador, Abitibi—Témiscamingue and Yukon for their comments.

In presenting his point of order, the parliamentary secretary argued that two of the amendments to Bill C-3 contained in the first report from the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, tabled on April 29, 2010, were beyond the scope of the bill as approved by the House at second reading.

[Translation]

The first motion presented by the member for Labrador during clause-by-clause consideration of the bill reads as follows:

That Bill C-3, in Clause 2, be amended by adding after line 16 on page 1 the following:

- (a.1) that person was born prior to April 17, 1985 and is a direct descendant of the person referred to in paragraph (a) or of a person referred to in paragraph 11(1)(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) or (f) as they read immediately prior to April 17, 1985;

[English]

As reported by the parliamentary secretary, this motion was ruled out of order by the chair on the basis that it went beyond the scope of the bill as approved by the House at the second reading stage. The ruling was appealed and overturned by a majority vote and the amendment was subsequently adopted by a similar vote.

In respect of the second amendment under dispute concerning the short title of the bill, the parliamentary secretary argued that it had only been allowed to proceed because of the adoption of the first amendment. He noted that in the absence of any amendment requiring it, no motion to amend a bill's title was admissible under our rules.

The member for Labrador argued that the court ruling in which the bill responded identified discriminatory provisions related to registration in the Indian Act beyond those specific to the *McIvor*

case. He stated that in its ruling the court of appeal pointed out that there may be other parts of the act that caused gender discrimination. He also drew to the attention of the House that there existed considerable latitude for the government to respond to the court's decision. In doing so, he cited a number of examples where legislation had gone well beyond the modifications to the law required by court decisions. He concluded that the amendment in question was entirely consistent with bills responding to court rulings.

[Translation]

The Chair has carefully examined Bill C-3, the Committee's report as well as the proceedings in the Committee dealing with clause-by-clause consideration of the bill.

As has been frequently noted, the Speaker's involvement in committee matters is limited except in cases where a committee has exceeded its authority. The adoption of amendments that are beyond the scope of a bill is such a case.

[English]

I would like to remind the House that the Speaker's role in these matters is limited strictly to determining the procedural issue that has been raised. While some members may be of the opinion that a different bill, perhaps broader in scope, ought to have been introduced, I must base my decision on the bill that actually was introduced and approved by the House at second reading.

[Translation]

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, p. 766, states:

An amendment to a bill that was referred to committee *after* second reading is out of order if it is beyond the scope and principle of the bill.

[English]

In the present case, in order to determine the scope of the bill, we need to put this legislative measure in its unique context. Bill C-3 was drafted in response to a ruling of the court of appeal for British Columbia, which struck down certain provisions of the Indian Act based on unequal treatment with respect to registration accorded to the descendants of some Indian women arising out of earlier amendments to the Indian Act made in 1985. The bill seeks to redress the specific inequality identified by the court. As such, it is of extremely narrow scope. It removes gender discrimination arising from transitional effects of the 1985 amendments as they relate to a particular family structure.

• (1510)

[Translation]

The amendment, adding a new sub-paragraph *a.1* to the conditions of registration in section 6 of the Indian Act, deals with all persons born prior to April 17, 1985 who are descended from those registered under the Indian Act, or entitled to be so registered, prior to that date. Individuals, whose status is not affected in any way by Bill C-3 as adopted at second reading, would have a different status as a result of this amendment. It may be that the amendment seeks to redress an inequality arising out of the Indian Act, but it is not addressing the specific inequality identified by the Court and initially targeted by Bill C-3. Consequently, the amendment exceeds the scope of the bill as set by the House at second reading and is therefore inadmissible.

[English]

The second amendment, changing the short title of the bill, is dependent on the broadening of scope resulting from the first inadmissible amendment. As such, in the absence of any other amendment requiring a change to the original short title, it too is inadmissible.

I therefore rule that the amendment to clause 2 of Bill C-3 and the amendment to the short title are null and void and no longer form part of the bill as reported to the House. In addition, I am ordering a reprint of Bill C-3 be published to replace the reprint ordered by the committee.

I thank hon. members for their attention.

ROYAL RECOMMENDATION—BILL C-501

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order with respect to Bill C-501, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and other Acts (pension protection).

Without commenting on the merits of the bill, I submit that its provisions to require the Minister of Labour to appoint an adjudicator to hear and adjudicate claims would require new government spending and therefore would require a royal recommendation.

Page 834 of the second edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states:

—a royal recommendation is required not only in the case where money is being appropriated, but also in the case where the authorization to spend for a specific purpose is significantly altered.

Bill C-501 would amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act so that the unfunded pension plan liabilities would be accorded the status of secured debts in the event of bankruptcy.

The bill would also amend the Canada Business Corporations Act to provide for a procedure by which former employees of a bankrupt corporation who were owed amounts by the corporation could proceed with claims against its directors. That procedure is set out in clause 6, which would require the Minister of Labour to appoint an adjudicator to hear and adjudicate claims and would set out the powers and functions of the proposed adjudicator. Section 23 of the Interpretation Act makes it clear that the power to appoint also includes the power to pay.

The requirement for a royal recommendation for a new officer of the Crown is made clear in the Speaker's ruling of November 9, 1978, which states, "If this bill is to impose a new duty on the officers of the Crown, these objectives will necessitate expenditures of a nature which would require the financial initiative of the Crown".

On September 19, 2006, in the case of Bill C-293, An Act respecting the provision of official development assistance abroad, the Speaker ruled on the need for a royal recommendation for the creation of an advisory committee that:

Business of Supply

—the establishment of the advisory committee for international development cooperation provided for in clause 6 clearly would require the expenditure of public funds...

On February 11, 2008, in the case of Bill C-474 provisions, for the appointment of representatives for an advisory council, the Speaker ruled that this required a royal recommendation:

Clause 7 of the bill provides for the governor in council to appoint 25 representatives to the advisory council....As the provision in Bill C-474 is such that the governor in council could choose to pay a salary to these representatives, this involves an appropriation of a part of the public revenue and should be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

These precedents also apply to Bill C-501. As I have mentioned, the bill's proposal to appoint an adjudicator would increase government spending for a new purpose and therefore must be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

• (1515)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his submissions. I am sure we will hear more from other hon. members on the point before I render a decision. Therefore, I will take the matter under advisement at this time.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—QUEBEC'S TRADITIONAL DEMANDS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Before question period, the honourable member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel had the floor, and he had a minute and a half left for his remarks.

The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel has the floor.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in my speech before question period I was mentioning the results of a survey which the Bloc Québécois conducted with the *Intellectuels pour la souveraineté du Québec*, a survey carried out from March 18 to April 6. There were 1,001 respondents in Quebec and 1,007 respondents in Canada outside Quebec.

There continues to be a strong impression in Quebec. Many Quebecers would like to see Canada reformed. About 45% of the population is in favour of sovereignty, but Quebecers have a very strong desire to reform Canada. What we are trying to get Quebecers and Canadians to understand is that Canada is not going to reform itself.

Business of Supply

In the survey, when Quebecers are asked whether a new division of powers and resources should be negotiated between Quebec and Ottawa so that Quebec is recognized as having special status, 73% of Quebecers say yes and 71% of Canadians say no. When asked whether the Quebec government should have more powers to protect the French language and culture, 82% of Quebecers say yes and 69% of Canadians say no. Should the Government of Canada respect in Quebec the provisions of Bill 101, which makes French the only official language in Quebec? To this question, 90% of Quebecers say yes and 74% of Canadians say no. When Quebecers are asked whether they are Quebecers, French Canadians or Canadians, 67% say Quebecer, 21% say Canadian and 12% say French Canadian. In 1995, however, 47% of Quebecers called themselves Quebecers

Quebeckers must be made to understand that Canada is not going to reform itself.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to give the member an opportunity to finish his last line. The statistics are important background information to have.

I also want to ask him about the responsibility Quebec has for representing the interests of francophones across the rest of the country. They rely very heavily on a number of jurisdictions or services provided by Quebec, many of which are funded by the federal government in terms of providing services to francophones across the country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, in my speech before question period, I spoke of the rigour with which the Bloc Québécois was acting in every situation. At our seminar on the weekend, the person who introduced the leader of the Bloc Québécois for his speech was the president of the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick. He expressed to us his deep sympathy for the work of the Bloc Québécois in defending the French fact and his profound conviction that, if Quebec ever became a country, it would continue to extend its influence throughout North America—the only francophone territory in North America—and would help to win respect for the rights of francophones everywhere in North America.

I thank my colleague for the opportunity he gives me to speak about the way that the Bloc Québécois works together with francophone communities all across Canada. The leader of the Bloc Québécois has just conducted a tour on which he met with the senior leaders of the francophone groups of Canada, and the message was so clear that one of those francophone groups, the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick, came to our seminar to talk to us about the support it is providing for our cause and for defence of the French fact in New Brunswick. The message from this association was that if Quebec were a country, it would have the chance to extend the influence of French throughout North America.

• (1520)

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell my colleague about how I have felt since coming here in 2004 every time I have seen the federal government encroach on our jurisdiction because of its spending power. It is getting harder and harder for us to defend Quebec's interests. Canada really is recreating itself without Quebec.

We are having an extremely hard time protecting the French fact. That is nothing new. We know that the Supreme Court is like the leaning tower of Pisa: it always leans the same way. Every Supreme Court ruling thwarts Bill 101 and erodes any hope we have of being able to live and work in French.

I would like him to tell us about hope and equality. As federalist parties in the House prepare to reduce Quebec's political weight by increasing the number of seats allocated to some provinces, what hope is there for our people? What are we supposed to say to our people, who feel discouraged about the fact that they live in a country that they have a harder and harder time identifying with as time goes by?

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières for her question. I know that she cares deeply about everything to do with arts and culture. Here is a perfect example.

When we ask the government to give Quebec the right to opt out with full compensation any time a program encroaches on provincial jurisdiction, we have one long-standing claim in mind with respect to culture. Quebec wants its own Quebec CRTC, or rather, its own Quebec RTC, so that it can control certain decisions. This week, the federal government refused to support the FrancoFolies de Montréal. What could be a better expression of the French fact than the FrancoFolies?

The federal government is spending that money instead of passing it on to Quebec by allowing it to opt out with full compensation. Opting out would enable Quebec to make its own spending decisions, but the federal government is taking that money and spending it in Quebec. It is taking a piecemeal approach for purely political reasons, but it has once again forsaken the French fact. Refusing to provide all of the funding that FrancoFolies organizers asked for will threaten an organization that promotes francophone culture on a global scale.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my speech, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

Every time the Bloc takes a step forward, it takes two steps back. Last week the Bloc members voted in favour of my private member's bill, which called on the Prime Minister to make an official apology for the injustices committed against Italian Canadians during the second world war. I very much appreciated the Bloc's support. But today I am very disappointed by this motion, which begins as follows: "That this House acknowledge that federalism cannot be renewed, since 20 years after the failure of the Meech Lake Accord —".

I think it is the Bloc that cannot be renewed. Its first leader, Mr. Bouchard, renewed himself a few months ago by admitting that the concept of separation is dead. He said it was time to work with Canada and forget the idea of separation. That is a renewed concept. After 20 years, finally, someone admitted that they should forget the idea of separation and work on strengthening the Quebec nation.

The Bloc has been in the House of Commons for 20 years, since the Meech Lake accord failed. It has not changed anything in those 20 years, except to deprive Quebec of a place at the federal government's decision making table.

The motion continues: “—Quebec still does not have the power to choose three justices on the Supreme Court of Canada—”. That means that the Bloc does not have the power to choose judges. There is no doubt that the Bloc, in eternal opposition, will never have the opportunity to choose judges.

The Liberal government has always consulted Quebec. Federal members from Quebec have always made sure they took part in those consultations.

The motion also states that Quebec does not have the right: “—to opt out with compensation from federal programs in its areas of jurisdiction—”. The Bloc has never given an example when that has happened. Under previous Liberal governments, several transfers of responsibility took place, for instance in the area of employment and training, and in health care.

When infrastructure money was transferred to the municipalities, we travelled all over Quebec. I remember, because there was a press conference with Jean Charest and Paul Martin. Two minutes after that press conference, there was another press conference with Mayor Gérald Tremblay and Jean Charest. The Prime Minister of Canada did not attend that press conference, out of respect for the provincial government's jurisdictions.

There were immigration transfers with full compensation. There is also education. The federal government gave permission for trade officers to be in embassies all over the world.

And we should not forget the increases in equalization to make up for what we did not exactly pay for these transfers of responsibility.

I will now move on to the fourth part of the motion, which says that Quebec does not have “a real veto over constitutional amendments and its status as a nation still has not been recognized in the Canadian Constitution”. What is the best tool Quebec has right now? It has a real right of veto with the notwithstanding clause.

The people of Quebec want their members to build a stronger Quebec and to work on substantive issues that affect them.

The Bloc has wasted many opportunities to stand up for Quebec's best interests.

• (1525)

In other words, we in the Liberal Party worked very hard to ensure that Quebec had a credible voice on the federal scene. Our party always shared Quebec's values of mutual help and support, and that is why an asymmetrical agreement on health care was signed under Paul Martin.

Today, our party shares Quebec's position on the environment, which is that 1990 should be the reference year and there should be massive investments in green technology. Our party shares Quebec's values when it comes to culture, economic and regional development, health care and freedom of association. We believe in a federalism of convergence where networks of jurisdictions and responsibilities are built between the private sector, NGOs and

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municipalities. This federalism is possible, and we invite Quebeckers to join with us to make this Canada a country they can identify with.

In moving this motion, the Bloc is once again wasting an opportunity to stand up for Quebeckers' best interests. It could have defended the gun registry today and called on this government to promise to maintain Canada's free universal health care system.

The Bloc could have taken responsibility and could have held this government accountable for dividing Canadians over its petty ideological policies. Over the past month, 11 women's groups and associations lost funding after they criticized the government's maternal health policies for the G8.

Other organizations also lost funding from a government that was looking to score political points with its core supporters. The government hid behind our soldiers to avoid having to answer direct questions about the transfer of Afghan detainees. It caused a rift between Canadians in urban and rural regions by refusing to take a firm stance on the registration of firearms and all other issues.

What makes this even worse is that, from the beginning, the separatist movement and the Parti Québécois never supported the Meech Lake accord. They wanted this accord to fail, and did everything they could to ensure it was never signed. When negotiations fell through, they blamed everyone else and claimed that the Canadian federation would never work.

This House voted to recognize Quebec as a nation within a united Canada in 2006. Four years later, the Bloc is declaring that federalism has failed. This argument is inconsistent.

Quite simply, this motion is unnecessary and does nothing for the people of Quebec or the province of Quebec. It is not good for Canada, and I will not support this motion.

• (1530)

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel. We are both from Quebec, but that is about all we have in common.

It seems that we did not have the same Quebec history course in high school. I think that it is quite clear that Quebec is now in a dead end. We could list all sorts of examples of where the federal government encroaches on provincial jurisdiction. The member said that he did not know of any. I can give him some.

Let us take health. The Liberal Party, like the Conservatives and the NDP, talks about a national mental health strategy, about the Public Health Agency of Canada and about the Department of Health. Unless I am mistaken, health is a provincial jurisdiction recognized in the Canadian Constitution. That is only one example.

I would like to ask him what he has to say to all the members of the Quebec National Assembly, which is the supreme institution of the Quebec nation, to explain why he is voting against the consensus it arrived at and why he is opposing it today.

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Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry for her question. It is quite simple. The health care system, the hospitals, doctors and nurses all come under provincial jurisdiction. In fact, the federal government does not interfere, but it does make transfers.

An agreement was signed with the Liberal government in 2005. A \$40 billion promise was made and Quebec was the only province that was not required to be accountable. The hon. members from the Bloc say this is not necessary, but we are talking about money that belongs to Canadians and Quebecers. There has to be accountability. Why is Quebec embarrassed to tell the rest of Canada what is being done with that money? Quebec has nothing to be ashamed of.

We are leaders in certain areas. Why can we not be an example to the rest of the country? As a Quebecer, I think we should have more pride than that.

• (1535)

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague, but first I want to go over a bit of history with him. In 1982, 28 years ago, Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Chrétien repatriated the Constitution and in 1990, 20 years ago, we had the Meech Lake accord.

What have the successive Liberal and Conservative governments offered Quebec to bring it back into Confederation?

Can my colleague give me one example of what the federal government has done to try to reopen the Constitution? No, because as the hon. member said, they consulted without listening. The Conservatives and Liberals alike did as they pleased. They consulted Quebec, but they did as they pleased.

I would like my colleague to tell me who founded the Bloc Québécois. It was hon. members who were here in the House. At the time, there were three parties: the Liberals, the Conservatives and the NDP. So, who founded the Bloc Québécois?

I expect a short and simple answer from him. I want to know. And I want short answers to my short questions.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, our debates here are always interesting. Members ask many questions. We try to write them down, but we sometimes forget some.

First, I will try to answer the member's last question. As I said in my speech, the Bloc founder is Lucien Bouchard. Up to know he is the only Bloc member who has been able to renew himself. In fact, there have been several, but he is the best known.

The motion says "that federalism cannot be renewed". Yet, it is the Bloc that has been unable to renew itself. However, the founder and first leader of the Bloc has been able to renew himself since he declared a few weeks ago that separatism did not work anymore and that we should build Quebec within Canada.

If my memory serves me correctly, in 1982, Mr. Lévesque was in power and it is he who negotiated the notwithstanding clause.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.) Mr. Speaker, I wanted to participate in this debate because I was one of the members who sat in this House at the time of the Meech Lake accord and the subsequent agreement. I know there was only one member of

the Bloc who was also in this House. So, when we talk about this motion in relation to Quebec's position in Canada or outside Canada, we must also be familiar with the political situation at that time.

I wanted to participate as a Canadian citizen, as a member of Parliament, and as former minister of the Government of Canada. At the time, there was no Bloc Québécois. There were only Mr. Mulroney's Conservatives, the Liberals and some NDP members. At the time, Mr. Lucien Bouchard was one of the most influential ministers in Mr. Mulroney's cabinet. He was Mr. Mulroney's *éminence grise* on constitutional issues.

I was here in the House where the member from Montcalm currently is. As a member of Parliament, I had the opportunity to hear Mr. Lucien Bouchard when he talked about Quebecers' aspirations and his vision of a united Canada. He was to me—I speak as a member—an individual who had a certain kind of presence, who wanted Quebec to enter a more welcoming Canada, but also a Canada focused on building a future together.

I recall one of my colleague's thoughts at the time. If Mr. Bouchard had continued a little longer, in fact, some of the members of the Liberal Party might have been convinced by his speech. Some things were accomplished. We can say that Mr. Bouchard changed the dynamics of the House by creating the Bloc Québécois with members of the Liberal and Conservative parties. He had a vision. Today, the same Mr. Lucien Bouchard, former minister of the Government of Canada, former premier of Quebec, says that this whole experience is no longer required and that there already is a place for Quebec and Quebecers within Canadian federalism, a place that the rest of the world envies.

The Europeans are studying the Canadian experience and are wondering how to achieve the kind of federalism found here in Canada, how to protect the culture, language, tradition, history of various nations and still be part of a great nation, an ambitious nation, a progressive country, a country that has earned everyone's respect. It is the same question Mr. Bouchard was asking himself. With no malice, I wonder why today Mr. Bouchard is no longer part of this Bloc Québécois that is very different in its aspirations and ambitions from twenty years ago.

As an individual, I was experiencing a very strange situation at the time because there was talk of a Canada that was in danger.

• (1540)

What was my role as a citizen? At that time, as a citizen and a member of Parliament, I agreed to improve the concept behind the Meech Lake accord.

Some people here, even Bloc members, will recall that the Charlottetown Accord had been negotiated by the present Quebec Premier and other people, including senators from Quebec, true Quebecers, who always wanted the best for the people of their province and of Canada too. Together, they designed an accord to attract attention, to reinforce the conviction and the participation of all Canadians.

As a citizen, I felt compelled to promote Canada in the context of the Charlottetown Accord. That accord gave even more than the Meech Lake accord to Quebecers.

Business of Supply

During the referendum, I chaired 17 public conferences in my Toronto riding. Most voters were in favour of the Charlottetown Accord. They wanted to say yes to all Quebecers and all Canadians who shared the vision of a strong and united Canada respecting all differences.

After that, I had the privilege to be a member of Mr. Martin's cabinet. We always talked about the role of Quebec within Canada. We discussed ways of moving forward, as a united Canada, to meet the challenges of Canadians, in Quebec as in all other provinces, from all cultures, traditions and nations. Quebecers were included in our plan.

The other ministers and myself reviewed all previous demands from Quebec and the demands of that time. When we talk about immigration today, we see that there is a Canadian model and a Quebec model. I dare say that the Quebec model has a strong influence on Canadian immigration. That was an innovation of Canadian federalism. It is an innovation that Europeans want to emulate.

We also see Quebec as a leader in public health. That is thanks to the funds the federal government transfers to the provinces.

● (1545)

[English]

I want to finish in just a few moments and I want to do it in English. I only have a moment or two. It is important to keep in mind that when one talks about Quebec, the Québécois and a nation, there are many who speak another language in that province and who have just as much of a desire and ambition to be a part of a new Quebec and a new Canada. That has to be reflected in any motion.

This motion is very narrow. It restricts. It has no ambition. It has no future. It excludes rather than encompasses, includes and grows. I try very hard to speak in French if I can, but in English I must say that I cannot support this. It is not because I am speaking in English, but because there is not room for everyone in a Bloc Québécois view of the world and of Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I found the Liberal member's speech interesting. They speak in Canada's defence in Quebec, but whenever they have a chance, they will be the first to stab us in the back. They are trying to convince and appease us with every means available in order to bring us back into a united Canada. They say Mr. Bouchard has changed his mind. This does not change the fact that between 1995 and 1997, they spent \$330 million to try to buy us off and keep us within Canada. They used all kinds of tricks and ads. In 2006 and 2007, we had the sponsorship scam. Of course, Canada is a beautiful country but if we can leave, we will have our own country.

The Conservatives introduced Bill C-12 to reduce Quebec's political weight. Will the Liberals vote with the Conservatives to reduce Quebec's political weight? They say they want us to stay with them.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, we are not trying to appease the people of Quebec so they will stay in a federalist Canada. The government implements programs for all citizens but to me, Quebec's weight has always been very, very high. There is no

reason to feel sorry for Quebec. This is not a province that bows down to Canada. Quebecers are on an equal footing with other Canadians. Quebec has its place within Canada. There are still hon. members in this House who are denying or ignoring the truth. They will not accept the fact that there is a much larger goal for Quebecers than the one the Bloc Québécois is offering them.

● (1550)

Mr. Robert Vincent: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member forgets that we are a founding people. Canada is what it is today because Quebec was there. We are not going to deny Quebec and to bring it into line. We are going to fight all the way to prevent Quebec from losing seats in the House.

I would like to ask the member if he intends to vote in favour of Bill C-12, whose objective is to reduce the weight of Quebec in the House of Commons.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I did more than that when I was a member of Prime Minister Martin's cabinet. We implemented many programs to put all areas of Canada, including Quebec, on a level playing field. We were building Canada as partners. Today, we talk as individuals who are not on the same level. That is a strategy that may be convenient for the Bloc, but it is not constructive, it is divisive.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate today in the debate on the opposition motion put forward by the Bloc Québécois. It is an exciting subject for me. I will take this opportunity to say that I will be sharing my time with the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges who is, in my opinion, an example and symbol of Quebec democracy.

The riding of Vaudreuil-Soulanges has almost always belonged to the Liberals, at least until 2004. With the sponsorship scandal, Quebecers woke up. They saw things clearly and they decided to place their trust in the Bloc Québécois. They were sure of being well represented. The member defeated the Liberal minister, and in the next election, in 2006, she defeated a very high profile candidate, who is now the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie. In the last election, she defeated a senator. So for us, the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges is a symbol that tells us that the Bloc Québécois has very secure roots and that there is a reason why Quebecers have marked a little x on their ballot, democratically, for the Bloc Québécois candidate for six consecutive elections.

I have listened to the speeches by members of the House of Commons. They have to stop saying that the Bloc Québécois is not an acceptable party because it wants to divide Canada. Quebecers have made a democratic choice. They are the ones who have the last word, and who decided to choose us. When they no longer choose us, it may be because they have already said yes to the country we want to have. But as long as we are here, we will speak for Quebecers, we will represent them, and most importantly, we will stand up for any consensus that is reached in the National Assembly of Quebec.

Business of Supply

I would note in passing that it is the supreme democratic governing body of the Quebec nation. There are bills and positions, whether they come from the government, the Liberals or the NDP, that do not have the support of the members from Quebec to respect these consensuses. A consensus of the National Assembly of Quebec means that all parties in the National Assembly, the Liberal Party, Québec solidaire, the Parti Québécois, federalists and sovereignists together, are united. They are united in telling the federal government that what it is preparing to adopt, that what the Liberals are preparing to do by supporting the Conservatives, is contrary to the consensus of the democratic governing body of Quebec.

We have to stop downplaying things and softening the edges. I was just listening to the speech by the member for Eglinton—Lawrence, who has a lot of experience. He has seen and heard many things. He has witnessed historic moments, but he has to stop saying everything is fine. Everything is not all that fine. I know some people would like the Bloc Québécois to die or disappear, but as long as Quebeckers want us and choose us, we will be here to represent them, strong, with all the principles we have, and most importantly with our passion for Quebec, our passion for standing up for the Quebec nation.

Last Saturday, the newspapers were talking about a conference I attended. It was a very well organized conference, with intellectuals, very educated people, who have put their minds to it and shared the fruit of their efforts, which is: we have tried everything. We tried the Meech Lake accord and the Charlottetown accord, two accords that wanted to share a little more power with Quebec and treat it like a nation. And they both failed.

I was particularly interesting to hear what two speakers had to say, one of them being Ms. Andrée Lajoie, whom some of you may know. She graduated in law and political science from the University of Montreal and Oxford. She explained to us that the Canadian Constitution is more the constitution of a unitary system instead of a federal or confederal one, and that it gave the federal government five different possibilities or ways to control the provinces.

• (1555)

I am a young member of Parliament, which does not necessarily mean I am young. I have not been a member of Parliament for a very long time, and I do not know by heart these five possibilities. Ms. Lajoie taught me there are five, and she urged us to make them known. That is what I would like to do during my remarks today.

The Canadian Constitution gives the federal government five legal ways to amend the Constitution unilaterally. The power of disallowance is certainly obsolete by now, and it has been seldom used, but it is still there. There is no guarantee it could never be used again.

There is also the declaratory power. Ms. Lajoie told us it has been used 472 times since 1867, twice since 2000, 118 times in Quebec only. I was anxious to know what this declaratory power is. It has been used for tramways in Montreal, Quebec City and Ottawa, local bus systems, hotels, restaurants and theatres. As a matter of fact, it can be used in a lot of situations we find in Quebec.

There is also the power to acquire public properties. Expropriation is an unfortunate example for many people in Mirabel. Their lands were expropriated to build an airport.

And then we have the spending power allowing the federal government to spend in a normative way in provincial jurisdictions.

The fifth possibility is based on interpretative theories, especially implicit jurisdiction, paramountcy, residual jurisdiction, national importance, and state of emergency.

The Supreme Court frequently makes use of these possibilities in its decisions. When we hear, read and peruse Ms. Lajoie's speech, we realize we should better explain to Quebeckers the real meaning of the sharing of powers between the provinces and the federal government. The number of sovereignists would probably rocket up very quickly.

The goal of Bloc Québécois members is to teach and convince. Our movement is young, and it may take time to build a country. Contrary to Mr. Bouchard, I think Quebec will become a country in my lifetime.

I also found another speaker to be quite interesting. Stéphane Paquin is a lecturer at the Institut d'études politiques in Paris and also teaches at the Université de Sherbrooke. He explained something very important to us; the fact that almost every international treaty will have local, regional or provincial consequences. There were reasons that the European Union, when negotiating a free trade agreement with Canada, insisted that the provinces be present at the negotiating table, and one was that it is interested in having access to government contracts. Because these government contracts are under provincial jurisdiction, the European Union wanted the provinces to sit in and participate in the negotiations. That is the trend with new treaties.

Canada is signing new treaties, but Quebec will feel the impact. Again, if we were masters in our own house, masters of our own country, Quebec would be at the table negotiating free trade agreements with other countries according to its values, culture and distinct character.

I would like to finish by saying that sovereignists are not people who are against Canada, rather, they are people who are for Quebec. Our fondest hope is to belong, to hold our country's reins, to be able to share and live side by side with the nation of Canada and have trade relations, as we would with other countries. I believe that if Quebec were to make that choice, Quebec-Canada relations would be much better and nationalist discussion would flourish within Quebec and would no longer be up for negotiation because Quebec as a nation would have chosen its country.

• (1600)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a comment. The member expressed herself quite well. She defined democracy in a new way. But before speaking about democracy, I would like to ask her if members of the Bloc Québécois have a monopoly on passion. Passion means dedication, the desire and the energy to defend what one has and to push for what one would like to have. Members of the Liberal Party, myself included, also have passion for a country in which Quebec is an equal partner.

Business of Supply

The member wants us to recognize the Bloc Québécois' passion, but I believe that she is overlooking the passion others feel for Canada and Quebec. Will she indicate once and for all that other Canadians also feel passion for their country?

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I am a social worker by training and I quickly learned to speak for “me”. I am passionate, which does not mean that I feel that others are not passionate. At heart, the member is probably as passionate about the Canadian nation as I am about the Quebec nation. We have the right to be passionate about our countries. The Canadian nation is not my nation, but I respect his passion for it. It is his most cherished right; there is no debate about passion.

What fascinates me, when I listen to the Liberals and the Conservatives, is this kind of ability to deny that a large number of Quebecers call Quebec's role in Canada into question. That cannot be denied; they cannot pretend that it does not exist. According to a recent Canada-wide survey, Quebec and Canada both want to talk about federalism, but not in the same way. Quebec wants to initiate a round of professional negotiations and Canada refuses. Given that dead end, we should each get on with our own business and everyone will be much happier for it.

• (1605)

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague opposite a question. In these times of globalization and major economic upheaval, does Quebec not have an exceptional opportunity to be part of Canada, of the Canadian federation?

A few years ago, Bernard Landry said that Quebec should separate, but keep the Canadian passport, currency and federal legislation. Is the member not talking about a decentralized federalism? Is it possible for my colleague opposite to imagine it? For example, in the European Union, independent European countries have formed a union and adopted a common currency. There is a convergence. Is it not time for Quebec, which is already part of Canada, to work with renewed enthusiasm on continuing to play a vital role within Canada?

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, the member for Lévis—Bellechasse asked me a question, which he then answered himself by citing the example of the European Union. The European Union brings together independent countries that negotiate and come to agreements. Nothing is stopping Quebec from becoming a country and an important player on the international scene, and collaborating with Canada and other countries. However, when negotiating on the international stage, it would do so as an equal with its own values and culture.

If Quebec were a country, its position on the environment would be much closer to that of European countries. Quebec's position on the environment is completely different from that of the federal government. I could easily give examples about language, culture, and the management of communications and telecommunications. It is a question of survival, of language, of identity and of culture. It is best to be independent in order to be able to negotiate on an equal footing with other countries. Quebec has—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges has the floor.

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ) Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry for her good words. The amount of work I do in my constituency is huge and I go about it diligently. I keep at it. It is a round-the-clock job that is a pleasure to do. I count myself fortunate to be able to do my job.

I was listening to hon. members speak. I remember 1990. I remember the Meech Lake accord saga because, at that time, I was beginning to form my ideas as I came of age. The first newspaper article that my father put under my nose on my birthday was a critique of the Meech Lake accord; that was on June 18, 1990. It is quite interesting that, at the time those discussions were taking place, I was also in the House as a political staffer. I was able to listen to discussions from both sides of the House on Quebec's claims.

So here are my views on the future of Quebec in Canada.

This year, in fact, marks both the 20th anniversary of the failure of the Meech Lake Accord and the 20th anniversary of the Bloc Québécois being in the House of Commons. My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I humbly invite our dear House of Commons colleagues to consider the results of the Canada-wide poll conducted for the *Intellectuels pour la souveraineté du Québec* and the Bloc Québécois. The document is quite eloquent. In the study's findings, members should easily recognize the answers to their questions about the constitutional expectations of Quebecers.

We have to point out that those who still think that federalism is “reformable” would do well to equip themselves with incredible patience because Canadian public opinion has regressed in 20 years.

Publishing this opinion poll at this time is most appropriate and allows us to clarify the visions for Quebec in the future. We have two roads before us. There is the road on which we are currently travelling within the Canadian federal framework, with no other vision than the status quo, which, for Quebec, means moving backwards. The other road, sovereignty, remains the only possible one.

Quebec is marching towards sovereignty, and today we have the opportunity to remember the road of federalism on which we have been travelling for so long, for too long.

There are three attributes of sovereignty: the capacity to make legislation, the capacity to act and speak on one's own behalf on the international stage, and the capacity to levy income tax.

The Quebec nation cannot build a future for itself on the basis of a perpetual “no”.

I thank the Bloc Québécois for allowing us to hear colleagues from all over Canada express their views on the constitutional issues of concern to Quebec.

Why is the future of Quebec in Canada less certain than people think? It is an illusion to believe that Canada is prepared to step back and concede any power whatsoever to Quebec and the provinces. Canada has always continued over the years to build itself and to falsely claim powers which, for the most part, will never be ceded back to Quebec and the provinces.

Business of Supply

There are certain historical landmarks from the time of the conquest in 1763 until 1867, which I will not be addressing in my speech but which are important all the same. I invite my colleagues to study them to find answers to their questions about relations between the British colonial government and its French-speaking colony.

Since the Canadian Constitution came into force on July 1, 1867, the interpretation of its text, particularly as regards the powers and the roles of each level of government, has been the subject of incessant quarrels and discussions.

The government did this at a time of crisis, in 1942. Previously, the federal government did not levy personal income tax or provide employment insurance.

Despite the promises of renewed federalism in 1980, in 1982 the federal government signed the forced patriation of the Constitution from the Parliament in London, adding to it an amending formula which now allowed it to appropriate powers in other fields, with the consent of certain provinces but without a decision by either of the founding peoples. Quebec will not sign the Constitution.

In 1982, Quebec experienced a fundamental setback. From 1960 to 1976, Quebec had claimed a veto to guarantee the long-term security of the province.

• (1610)

As Georges Mathews notes:

The Constitution of 1982 enables the federal government to take over provincial jurisdictions bit by bit as long as the anglophone majority agrees. With the new amending formula, Quebec has less power than the four Atlantic provinces combined, which have less than a third of its population.

In the wake of another promise, this time in 1984, to integrate Quebec into the new Constitution with honour and enthusiasm, a new round of negotiations began. The federal government and the provinces agreed to accept Quebec's basic conditions.

To answer my colleagues opposite, Quebec's basic conditions were the following: a recognition of Quebec as a distinct society; a constitutional veto for Quebec and the other provinces; the right to financial compensation for any province that chooses to opt out of any future federal programs in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction; increased provincial powers with respect to immigration; and that three judges from Quebec be appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada by the federal government on nomination by the Government of Quebec.

Robert Bourassa wanted Quebec and the provinces to be given exclusive jurisdiction over language. He wanted more power over labour and communications. The position of anglophones in Quebec is difficult to understand and the accord therefore enshrined duality. Quebec wanted to limit the federal government's spending power in areas of provincial jurisdiction.

In 1987, despite an initial agreement that seemed to echo the Meech Lake accord, the provinces had three years to get any agreement in principle approved by their legislatures. It was then that this attempt to reconcile the demands of Quebec and the provinces failed and revealed a clearer picture: the rest of Canada refused to recognize the specificity of Quebec.

We must remember that for the first time since 1867, Meech Lake symbolically gave Quebec explicit recognition of its specificity. We must also remember that, contrary to what English Canada might believe, Quebec did not get everything it wanted. It was Quebec that ended up making substantial concessions before signing the accord.

Robert Bourassa agreed that the federal government could impose its conditions within provincial jurisdictions. That was a major concession. According to professors Andrée Lajoie and Jacques Frémont:

What may appear at first sight to be a federal government concession to Quebec and the provinces will be revealed, after more detailed examination, as a major victory for Ottawa, who will thereby finally be able to do what it has been attempting for years, namely to acquire the constitutional authority to invest and, to all practical purposes, control every area of exclusively provincial jurisdiction.

In 1992, the Charlottetown accord was defeated. In 1997, still without Quebec, the premiers of the nine other provinces rejected the unique character of Quebec society in the Calgary declaration, which we do not hear much about, because it did not become an interpretive clause in the Canadian Constitution.

In 1998, the Supreme Court ruled that if there was a clear majority vote in favour of the secession of Quebec, the government would be required to negotiate the terms of secession in good faith. In 1999, the government introduced the Clarity Act, which changed the rules. Once again, the federal government reminded Quebec that it was in control, that it had control over one of its provinces.

My colleagues have spoken about other events in recent history, so I will not repeat them. However, as I just showed, there are certainly no cure-alls to be found in the Canadian Constitution. No matter where you look, and despite the existence of any agreements, the government could invoke any number of reasons to unilaterally make a decision without the agreement of Quebec or another province.

• (1615)

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions to ask. First, why not recognize the improvement and the evolution of federalism in the last 20 years? I am thinking particularly about immigration, where Quebec got all its powers back, thanks to a Conservative government that negotiated an historic agreement. There is also the recognition of the Quebec nation, Quebec's place at UNESCO and the Quebec role in the Francophonie. Why refuse to recognize that federalism is evolving in the same direction as the aspirations of Quebec? Moreover, in October 2005, the leader of the Parti Québécois said that there would be a five year period of disturbances and difficulties because it is obvious that such radical changes cannot happen without some perturbations.

Why avoid fundamental issues? If there is no will for Quebec to continue its development within the Canadian federation, painful choices will have to be made. We are just at the end of an economic crisis. Taking that into consideration, could the member from the Bloc give more details on the prolonged period of difficulties and economic disturbances the leader of the Parti Québécois was talking about in 2005?

Business of Supply

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Speaker, it must maintain and continue to refine its main tools for economic intervention. That includes immigration and the whole range of economic tools. This week, we will see the corporate community opposing the centralization of the securities commission in Toronto, which is an example of a federal attack on Quebec and its economic and political interests.

I would also like to remind the member of the Quebec government's negotiations and concessions in terms of immigration at the time of the Meech Lake accord. The federal government enshrined the possibility for any province to negotiate the equivalent of a Cullen-Couture agreement with Ottawa.

Quebec got nothing more than an administrative agreement guaranteeing that it would receive a number of immigrants proportional to its population. The Quebec government is asking for more authority when it comes to immigration, and it is still waiting.

• (1620)

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for reminding us that Quebec did not sign the Canadian Constitution. The Meech Lake accord, with its five little conditions, and the Charlottetown accord were both failures.

What strikes me is that Canada has basically given up on reintegrating Quebec and accommodating it. It seems more like a systematic demolition of Quebec's rights by encroaching on its jurisdiction. What I am most worried about is the general lack of understanding.

What does my colleague think about this lack of understanding between the two solitudes? We know that an inability to understand, on the individual level, often leads to divorce. I think that this is what will happen to Canada.

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Speaker, in my speech I tried to remind the House of some important points in the history of the Quebec nation and the attempts we have made. We have tried everything, in fact. It is unrealistic to think that Canada can be reformed.

Canada is going to continue building itself regardless of the motions moved in this House. As long as these motions remain symbolic and have no legal weight, they will remain inconsequential.

The federal government's response as reflected in certain recent bills, such as the one on Quebec's democratic weight, and the attacks on the spending power in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction are merely arguments in favour of us pursuing our path towards sovereignty.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to take part in this debate on the motion moved by the hon. member for Joliette.

The hon. member for Joliette raises some points that I would like to address as a Quebecker and federal MP for Lévis—Bellechasse serving my constituents and the Quebec nation.

First of all, I have no intention of supporting this motion for two reasons. First, it precludes reforming Canadian federalism and prevents Quebec from showing what it is capable of within Canada.

The second reason is because it does not recognize the improvements to and the evolution of federalism since the Meech Lake accord. I firmly intend to oppose this motion.

I think this motion gives us the opportunity to put things back in their historical context and in order to do so, we have to go back to the unilateral patriation of the Constitution in 1982. At that time, the Liberal government of the day unilaterally repatriated the Constitution, without Quebec's consent.

Even though I am a proud Quebecker who wants Quebec to grow within the Canadian federation, I cannot accept that. It was unacceptable at the time and it remains so today. And I am not the only one to think so. Many Canadians think as I do that patriating the Constitution unilaterally had adverse consequences of which we are still feeling the effects today.

The former Conservative leader, Robert Stanfield, from Nova Scotia, said this about the unilateral patriation of the Constitution in 1982 by the federal Liberal government, led at the time by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau:

No Quebec premier in human memory would have accepted the 1982 Constitution. In 1982, English Canada forgot its history. We abandoned our tradition of not changing the rules that govern Quebec without Quebec's consent. I thought then and I still think now that the 1982 exercise put Canada as a country in jeopardy.

The unilateral patriation of the Constitution was particularly egregious as the process was supposed to be based on the willing consent of all parties. The quotation continues:

Ottawa not only missed an opportunity for constitutional renewal following a positive vote in the referendum; Ottawa also betrayed francophone Quebeckers who voted for constitutional renewal.

That is what happened in 1982. It showed contempt for the nation of Quebec. It was unacceptable, and it was the doing of a federal Liberal government.

What led us from the unilateral patriation of the Constitution to the Meech Lake accord? The Meech Lake accord was a Canadian plan developed under the leadership of a Conservative government. That is the reality.

Unfortunately, what I find paradoxical today, is that sovereignist members are introducing a motion that sings the praises of the Meech Lake accord to high heaven. Just like the federal Liberal members, they all found themselves on one side of the fence and opposed that accord. They dug its grave, no question.

Today, we see that the members of the Bloc have thrown in the towel, while still keeping their hands on the benefits of Canadian federalism and relegating Quebec to the opposition benches. I am sharing my opinion and hon. members are free to take a different view.

This motion gives me an opportunity to pay tribute to a great Quebecker and a great Canadian. He had his finest moment here on May 1, 1987, when he informed the House that:

—the Premiers and I reached unanimous agreement in principle on a constitutional package which will allow Quebec to rejoin the Canadian constitutional family.

This agreement enhances the Confederation bargain and strengthens, I believe, the federal nature of Canada. Although it remains to be formalized, it represents in the judgment of First Ministers from all political stripes and from all areas of the country an historic accomplishment.

Business of Supply

•(1625)

Of course, members will recognize the words of the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, who said this here in this House on May 3, 1987. He also drew a parallel with a statement by another former Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, who said:

The governing motive of my life has been to harmonize the diverse elements which compose our country.

Surely, that is the wish of every Member on all sides of the House. That is our policy, our purpose—building a stronger Canada for all Canadians.

That is the Meech Lake accord. It is a Canadian proposal prepared under the leadership of a Conservative government, with a vision that would bring Quebec back into the Canadian federation with its full consent. People recognized that it was a unique and unprecedented gesture. I am thinking in particular of Roger Tassé, who was the main author of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. He said that, of course, like any agreement, it was not perfect, but it was certainly as good as the 1982 amendments. It was a major constitutional accord that was a defining moment for Canada, resolved matters left unresolved in 1982 and brought Quebec back into the constitutional fold, an accord that had been signed by 11 Canadian first ministers, an unprecedented achievement.

That is what we had under a Conservative government. We had a Canada that worked, a Canada with a place for everyone. That was until people came along and sabotaged the Meech Lake accord. Now, 20 years later, it is important to tell people that those forces are still at work here in the House. We must remember that the Conservative government played a crucial role in helping Canada and Quebec continue to thrive.

I have a quote here from a member who is still in the House. This is from the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, who was the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada for a time. He said:

After Meech we would have had stability for a very long time. And the worst constitutional error in the history of Canada was probably Mr. Trudeau's campaign against Meech.

That was a current member of the Liberal Party acknowledging the problems that sabotaging the Meech Lake accord created. People definitely have strong feelings about it because what happened was unacceptable and we are still suffering from the after-effects.

So here we have the centralist Liberals who torpedoed the Meech Lake accord and people who threw in the towel. I am not throwing in the towel. We have made real progress over the past 20 years and under the leadership of our current Prime Minister. Canada can evolve and Quebec can evolve within the Canadian federation.

A prime indicator is the recognition of the Quebec nation, which is similar to one of the clauses in the Meech Lake accord about recognition of a distinct society. We recognized that Quebec is not only a distinct society, but a nation. That happened here in this House. Where there is a will, there is a way, and this is a good example of what we can accomplish when we want to move federalism forward. That is one very good reason why I oppose the motion.

Our government, like the majority of Quebeckers, is betting on Quebec remaining within Canada. We believe that Canada and Quebec can continue to work together and make it a winning proposition. That has been the underlying principle of our policies

since 2006. This policy is supported by concrete action consistent with the vision of a modern and confident Canada, resolutely turned towards the future. In the Canadian federation, no partner is made to renounce its very nature. On the contrary, we believe that each partner, with its own assets and strengths, contributes to our collective nation building. That also applies to Quebec which, with its flourishing culture, rich identity, vigorous economy and dynamic entrepreneurs, plays an important role in this country, allowing us and Quebeckers to maximize our potential and to realize our legitimate aspirations.

•(1630)

Quebeckers, together with other Canadians, have risen to the challenge. Our government intends to continue in that direction for the benefit of all Canadians. Canada poses a collective challenge, to which each of its components is asked to respond. This objective has been defined by some with a slogan that is also a program: unity in diversity.

This objective is being met by practising a federalism that respects the responsibilities of each of our provincial and territorial partners and takes into account the major issues of our time.

Our government favours an approach based on open federalism, an approach that recognizes that the federation, far from being static, is constantly evolving in order to adapt to change and the realities of the modern world. This approach allows the federation to better respond to the challenges faced by the provinces and territories and gives results for all Canadians.

For example, we worked with all the provinces and territories to implement Canada's economic action plan last year and we are continuing with that process.

In the last two years, Quebec's economic performance was remarkable, thanks to the Quebeckers in the House who supported the economic action plan. The best example of this is that right now, the lowest unemployment rate in Canada is in the Quebec City region, a region represented by a majority of Conservative members.

Investments from the economic action plan have been made in all ridings in Quebec, regardless of political representation. In all regions and all major cities in Quebec, the economic action plan will provide benefits in terms of infrastructure and culture, for workers, businesses and the forestry sector. The economic action plan gives concrete and tangible results, and puts Quebec in a relatively enviable economic position.

In terms of infrastructure, we committed to taking immediate action to start work and to accelerate funding for projects for the 2009 and 2010 construction seasons.

The economic action plan offers a series of concrete measures, agreed to by premiers and territorial leaders on January 16, 2009, to make substantial investments in the budget to support the economy in the short term and also prepare it for longer-term challenges.

Business of Supply

This plan is achieving the desired results. Canada made it through this global recession better off than all the G7 nations. I have a hard time understanding why the Bloc members are against this economic action plan, which is fundamentally good for Quebec. It is clear. Quebec, as part of Canada, is in one of the most enviable positions in the G7.

Recent developments in the economic situation indicate that the action plan has helped stabilize the national economy and has helped restore economic growth. Economic growth means economic independence and autonomy. The Conservative members have helped make our country economically independent. More than 285,000 jobs have been created since July 2009. Consumer and business confidence has significantly improved and has returned to its previous levels.

We have some work to do in the House to ensure Quebec's economic prosperity. I can say that the team of Conservative members and senators from Quebec can be counted on and are doing a great job. We need only look at our remarkable justice initiatives that Quebecers very much appreciate.

I want to come back to the economy. In the end, demand has increased much more than in all the other G7 countries. This shows that people are regaining confidence in the economy.

Thanks to the economic action plan, taxes were reduced. That is another measure taken by the Conservatives. Quebecers are paying less taxes at the federal level because the Conservatives lowered taxes and the GST. Let us also not forget EI benefits, which were extended for the unemployed. Then, there are thousands of infrastructure projects that are underway across the country.

•(1635)

In Quebec's CEGEPs, record investments were made in science and technology. Industries and communities are benefiting from a strong support, and some exceptional measures were taken to improve access to financing.

Over the past year, the government has also signed agreements to allow provinces, territories, municipalities and private sector partners to implement shared responsibility initiatives. We are talking about an investment of \$47 billion in our economy, in addition to the provinces' contribution of \$15 billion. For Quebec, this means that, in addition to the economic action plan, federalism has provided some major benefits, but also tools for the Canadian federation as a whole.

In 2010-11, Quebec will continue to benefit from large federal transfers, since federal support for the provinces and territories has reached unprecedented levels and will continue to grow. For Quebec, it will total \$19.3 billion in 2010-11. The moneys that Quebec will receive from the federal government will reach unprecedented levels.

I can reassure my colleagues by telling them that Quebec Conservative members supported these measures. Unfortunately, members opposite did not do so, and that is very regrettable. Among other things, Quebec is getting \$280 million more than it did in 2009-10, which was already a record year. Let us not forget that Quebec is getting close to \$6.8 billion more than when the federal Liberal conservative government was in office.

Quebec has never received as much as in the recent past, with a Conservative government in Ottawa and with Conservative members from Quebec who think that the province can continue to do very well within the Canadian federation and be an active player.

This increased long term support helps ensuring that Quebec has the necessary resources to provide essential public services, while contributing to the establishment of common national objectives in health care, post-secondary education and other important parts of Canada's social security net.

As for the wealth distribution system of equalization, it is important to remember that Quebec received \$8.6 billion, almost \$3.8 billion or 78% more than in 2005-06. And for the Canada health transfer, Quebec received \$6.1 billion, which is \$294 million more than last year. The Canada social transfer was \$2.6 billion.

That means that even though our government has experienced some economic turmoil, we maintained transfers to the provinces in order to allow our provincial partners, and Quebec in particular, to maintain overall services. In addition, contrary to our colleagues on the other side, we did not make deep cuts at a time when our partners needed money. That is what I wanted to point out.

I would have liked to talk about what we are doing in terms of knowledge and innovation, as well as what we are doing for workers. Today I believe that we need to remember that, essentially, the Meech Lake accord was a project undertaken by a Conservative government that wanted Quebec to fully and of its own accord rediscover its place within the Canadian federation.

I gave the example of the Liberal Party of Canada, which sabotaged the Meech Lake accord, as did the sovereignists, who did not want it to work because it would allow Quebec to continue to grow within the Canadian federation. I believe that this accord had a noble objective, and I applaud those who crafted it. It is understandable, for obvious reasons, that I have no praise for those who killed it. The Conservative government will continue to practise an open federalism that recognizes Quebec as a part of the Canadian federation.

•(1640)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Human Resources and Skills Development; the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Citizenship and Immigration; the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer, Ethics.

* * *

[English]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following public bill, to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and other Acts.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—QUEBEC'S TRADITIONAL DEMANDS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House of certain historical facts and I forgive my hon. colleague from Lévis—Bellechasse for perhaps forgetting them, given how young he is.

It is important to remember that, for sovereignists, the Meech Lake accord was what we referred to as the “beau risque”, and that we were definitely not the ones who killed the Meech Lake accord. I would remind the House that it was Elijah Harper, an aboriginal leader, who was demanding more rights for aboriginal people in this accord, and Clyde Wells, who no doubt was greatly inspired by the Liberals, who were whispering in his ear. They are the ones who torpedoed the deal.

I must say, I was very surprised to hear the member say that with this motion we are hindering all reforms to Canadian federalism. I had to wonder what reforms he was talking about. I did not see any such reforms go through this House. For him, does reforming federalism mean putting Quebec at a disadvantage by reducing its political weight by increasing the number of seats in other provinces? Does it mean a Canada-wide securities commission? If that is what he means by reforming federalism, I doubt very much he would have our support.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the interpreters in this House on the excellent job they do.

I thank my colleague for her comments. I may be guilty of some historical inaccuracies, but she should have no fear, for I will check my sources. But there is one thing about which I can reassure her, and she can check it herself. I would like to tell her about a great father of Confederation, Mr. Chauveau, who was Premier of Quebec. He was a reformer at heart and someone who helped Quebec grow and thrive. He was also a democrat. He even signed a manifesto with a number of other Quebecers to ensure that there would be representation by population in the House in which we are sitting and that demographic growth in the different parts of the country would be taken into account.

I believe that that goes hand in hand with a nation that is thriving, sure of itself and confident of taking its rightful place, but that also recognizes the place of others and their demographic weight. That is what I would say right off the bat about that issue.

Regarding the other issue of economic crimes and the importance of developing tools, I would just like to remind her of two facts. The International Monetary Fund and the OECD are pressing the federal government to create a more effective securities commission than we have now. I would also mention that the victims of Earl Jones are begging us to do something to prevent people from being swindled like that again. These people are in favour of standardization and a single securities commission.

I also want to reassure her that we fully respect the securities regulator in Quebec. It can continue to exercise its authority. This is a voluntary measure.

● (1645)

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of his speech, the member for Lévis—Bellechasse said that the Liberals' unilateral patriation of the Constitution in 1982 was not quite right and that the Liberal Party never asked Quebec whether it agreed with the idea. I should point out that, at the time, 75 Quebec members were Liberals. They could have asked Quebec whether it agreed. I think that MPs from Quebec, who were all Liberal Party members, could have opposed the whole thing.

We are seeing the same thing today. Bill C-12 would further marginalize the Quebec nation within Canada by reducing its political weight in the House of Commons from 36% of the seats in 1867 to 22.4% in 2014.

My question for my colleague is simple. Some Quebec MPs are Conservative Party members. The government wants to reduce Quebec's demographic weight in the House of Commons, but Quebec has told the Conservative Party that it is not in favour of this.

Will the member respect Quebec's will by voting against reducing the province's political weight in the House of Commons? He said that Liberal Party MPs did not consult Quebec. These two approaches have much in common. I would like to know if he plans to respect Quebec's choice.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member opposite for his question. I would like to answer in two parts.

We have to make a distinction between demographic weight and political weight. For demographic weight, I am sure that my colleague is a great democrat and recognizes that the basic principle of “one person, one vote” applies. I agree with this principle, as do many Quebecers and great democrats, whether they are sovereignists or not, René Lévesque or Daniel Johnson Sr. It is a principle my colleague agrees with. That is demographic weight.

As far as political weight is concerned, I suggest that my colleague come to this side of the House and sit with the government. That way, Quebec would have political weight in the government and could participate fully. I invite the hon. member and his colleagues to join me to make Quebec's voice even louder within the government.

Even though there are not many of us, we are doing our jobs. During the debate on the nation of Quebec, I recall that it was my colleagues, such as the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles and the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent, who defended loud and clear the recognition of the Quebec nation. Our Bloc colleagues took two days to realize that this made sense and decide that they would vote in favour as well.

● (1650)

Mr. Robert Vincent: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member still does not understand the issue. He said that, in 1982, the members of the House did not consult Quebec and that the Constitution was patriated unilaterally. Quebec told the Conservative Party that it wants its political weight to remain the same. The message is clear. The National Assembly wants to keep the same political weight. The Conservative members from Quebec will have to listen to Quebec and vote the way Quebec wants.

Business of Supply

I see a double standard here. The Liberals did one thing in 1982, but today, the Conservatives say that that is not important and that the same thing will not happen again. In 1982, we should have consulted Quebec and listened to what it had to say. Today, they are well aware that the political weight of Quebec must remain the same, but I am sure that they will not listen to Quebec and that they will vote against it, even though these people represent Quebecers.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I would remind my hon. colleague that the motion on the Meech Lake accord that we are debating here today made no mention of the issue he just raised, namely, democratic weight. However, I would like to reassure him. In that regard, as a Quebecker and someone who believes in democracy, I feel that the principle of one person, one vote is important and many intellectuals from Quebec, past and present, share that opinion. Chauveau, in particular, comes to mind, along with many Quebec prominent figures who recognize the importance of democratic weight, which is a fundamental principle of democracy.

That said, I am pleased to see that my colleague across the floor also wants to improve Canadian federalism. How fortunate. I believe that Quebec still has a great future within Canada and I encourage him to continue with his constructive comments. We need the support of the Bloc Québécois to create a stronger Quebec and a stronger Canada.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am going to share my time with my colleague, the hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher. My speech will contain a number of corrections to the points that the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse has just raised.

The basic question before us is “Can Canada be reformed?” At the moment, the answer is no. The only solution for Quebec is sovereignty. We would then have full power over everything sovereignty means: we could sign international agreements and we could keep our taxes for Quebec. As to the federation, everything has already been tried.

I would like to correct a number of things that the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse raised. First, there were a number of constitutional attempts. We have mentioned the Meech Lake accord and the Charlottetown accord here. I will speak about those, but we must also remember there was an attempt in Victoria where the Robert Bourassa government said that we did not have enough powers and so we could not accept it. So that was dead in the water.

Each time that Quebec has been faced with fundamental issues of having to water down its powers, Quebec premiers have all stood up and said that we cannot accept that. There was Victoria, but then there was Meech Lake. It is wrong to say that sovereignists dropped it or torpedoed it. On the contrary, at the time, it was called the “beau risque”. There were agonizing debates in Quebec, but at least we ended up saying that we were going to give Canada a chance, and see if, with five little minimum conditions, we could bring the whole federal family together.

The agreement was not torpedoed by sovereignists, but by Elijah Harper, who said that there was not enough in it for aboriginal peoples. But Mr. Harper said that he agreed with Quebec's claims. It

was Elijah Harper who prevented Manitoba from signing the agreement.

And what about Clive Wells in Newfoundland who went back on his signature? I remember well the kiss that Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Jean Chrétien gave Clyde Wells to thank him for taking his province out of the agreement and going back on his signature, with the result that the Meech Lake accord failed.

We have to talk about what happened. When the accord failed, Brian Mulroney appointed Jean Charest to try to water down powers once more on both sides. That was to get Quebec to swallow a potion that was unpalatable at the time. So Jean Charest was appointed by Brian Mulroney to prepare the Charlottetown accord. The Charlottetown accord was rejected by both the people of Canada and the people of Quebec.

Quebeckers said that the Charlottetown accord did not give them enough powers. Their powers were too watered down and it made no sense to agree to it. The Rest of Canada, the ROC, said that it did not agree to the accord because it gave too many powers to Quebec. That is the ditch that was dug between them. Polls show that there are two countries in Canada. It is no longer a ditch, it is the Grand Canyon that divides Canada's two founding peoples.

I have a lot to say about the recognition of the Quebec nation. Aside from its symbolic value, what good does it do Quebeckers? We have made several attempts. The highest court on the other side—as Mr. Duplessis said, it is like the tower of Pisa, which always leans to the same side, the federal side—has ripped our Bill 101 to shreds. That is a loss for Quebec as well as for the world's heritage. We have to protect the French language in America. We are surrounded by 300 million anglophones. If we do not have a law to protect our language, it will be watered down until it disappears entirely like so many aboriginal languages that are disappearing in Canada.

When we try to apply recognition of the Quebec nation to the Canada Labour Code in Quebec—as we all know, French is the language of work in Quebec—they say it is out of the question. So how is recognizing a nation anything more than symbolic?

My colleagues talked about the Canada-wide securities commission, which will transfer power from Montreal to Toronto. What does the Quebec nation mean in that context?

● (1655)

Why would anyone want to get rid of francophone know-how, assimilate it and pack everything off to Toronto? I should remind everyone that Quebec's National Assembly is unanimously against the idea. That is important to note. That is why, earlier, my colleague from Shefford asked other members how, as Quebeckers, they planned to vote.

Business of Supply

The same goes for the 30 seats they want to add. Once again, Quebec's National Assembly is unanimous. People do not agree with the proposal because it would dilute Quebec's power. Some people, including the member for Lévis—Bellechasse, say that a vote should have the same weight no matter where it is. However, federalists always forget to mention Prince Edward Island, which has four members for 120,000 inhabitants. So the concept does not apply to them. Exceptions can be made for other provinces like Prince Edward Island. These things are the way they are for historical reasons. What is the government doing with one of the founding nations, with Quebeckers? It seems to me that exceptions should be made for a founding nation, that the government should act on its recognition of the Quebec nation if it wants that recognition to be more than just symbolic. Those arguments do not work. That is why I say that Canada cannot change. Every time we go to them with ideas, all they ever say is no, no, no.

An interesting survey was conducted. As I said earlier, there is a gap between English Canada and Quebec. It is not just a ditch, it is the Grand Canyon. For example, people were asked whether the federal government should have to respect Bill 101 in Canada and in Quebec. I just spoke about this. In Quebec, 73% of respondents said yes, and in Canada, 83% said no. Those are two extremes. There are two countries in this country. That is what this means.

They were also asked whether the Constitution should give Quebec the power to appoint the three Supreme Court judges. This was one of the conditions of the Meech Lake accord, by the way. In Quebec, 83% of respondents said yes, and in English Canada, 73% said no. Once again, those are completely opposite. There are two countries in this country.

Should the Constitution give Quebec full jurisdiction over immigration on its territory? Seventy-eight per cent of Quebeckers think so, while 77% of Canadians say no. These are extreme differences. When I say that the Charlottetown accord was rejected because Quebec did not have enough powers, while English Canada was saying that it was getting too many, these numbers are proof of that as regards language and immigration, but it goes on and on.

Should Quebec have more powers regarding language and culture? In Quebec, 82% of the respondents say yes, while in the rest of Canada, 69% say no. Where is the recognition of the Quebec nation? Where is the recognition of a different culture and language in Canada? The numbers tell the tale.

Should the Canadian Constitution recognize that Quebec forms a nation and should it include that recognition? Seventy-three per cent of Quebeckers say yes, while 83% of Canadians say no. It is becoming increasingly clear to me that there is no possibility of getting along. A reform is not possible.

Should Quebec have more powers and a special status? Seventy-three per cent of Quebeckers say yes, while 71% of Canadians say no. It is increasingly clear that, as regards these issues, we are at opposite ends, we are very very far apart.

I am going to mention one last question. Should the Government of Canada respect, on Quebec's territory, the provisions of Bill 101, which makes French the only official language in Quebec? We find

that 90% of Quebeckers answered yes to that question, while 74% of Canadians said no. It is like that throughout the survey.

To those who think that a reform is possible in Canada, I say it is a big illusion, a fantasy. That cannot happen precisely because of people's perception and the fact that there are two countries in this country. If there are two countries in this country, we agree that Canada should be sovereign. Conversely, Canada must agree that Quebec should also be sovereign. That is the only solution to finally come to an agreement with our colleagues. Let us forget constitutional reforms. They are not possible because of the Canadian and Quebec perceptions. Therefore, sovereignty is the final solution for Quebec.

● (1700)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague opposite a question. He spoke about the Francophonie earlier. What would happen to the 1.5 million francophones outside Quebec when it achieves sovereignty? What would it do to help them? As far as I know, they have never lifted a finger to help francophones outside Quebec. I would like to know how it would help them since they are also part of the Canadian Francophonie.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I think that when it comes to protecting the French fact, we have always stepped up to the challenge, both in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada. We have always helped our colleagues, be they Acadians, Franco-Ontarians or Franco-Manitobans. We do not work like the Conservative Party, which always expects something in return. Just because they oppose Quebec sovereignty does not mean that we will not help them. We have to be more generous than that.

I would like to remind my colleague that for a number of years the Commissioner of Official Languages has noted, year after year, that the French fact is diminishing in the rest of Canada. That is normal. There is no support for these people. They are alone in a sea of anglophones. If a sovereign Quebec were guaranteed to have French as its language—which is what we are aiming for—I believe that we would be much more effective in defending the people in America who consider the beautiful French language to be their mother tongue.

● (1705)

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question about this motion for my colleagues opposite. If I am not mistaken, on November 9, 2009, in the riding of Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, after electing a Bloc opposition member for 16 years, the people made a completely different choice. I would like to know how they see the heartbreaking defeat they suffered in my riding.

Business of Supply

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that it was a heartbreaking defeat. But we live in a democracy. We always respect the voters' decision. I have always told my constituents that if they do not want me as their member anymore and they elect someone else, I will never question their decision. I will tell myself that it was their decision. There is a Latin saying that the voice of the people is the voice of God. But recent polls give me hope that we will win back that riding and several others in the Quebec City area. The Conservatives can go ahead and blindly follow their ideology. Quebeckers will make their decision in the next few years.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, if the voice of the people is the voice of God, I would like to tell my colleague that the people in my riding elected a Conservative for a very simple reason: when a party is in power, it can really accomplish things. In 20 years, the Bloc has not been able to accomplish anything in Ottawa. I do not know what the Bloc members are doing in Ottawa if they want Quebec to be independent. Quebec independence will happen in Quebec City, if it ever does happen. I sincerely believe that that is where the Bloc should go.

My question is very simple: how can the members opposite claim to stand up for Quebeckers' interests when Quebeckers elect Conservatives to Parliament?

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is somewhat mistaken. All in all, 30,000 Saint-Jean constituents voted for me. I won. The Bloc won 49 seats in Quebec. The people decide and that always holds true. Just because the people for a Conservative in his riding does not mean that there is nothing more for us to do here. We have heard that before and it is a blow to democracy. Forty-nine Bloc members were elected to this place. That is democracy. I am asking my colleague to respect democracy as much as I do.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Saint-Jean, who made a very interesting speech. I will no doubt touch on some of the results of the survey he mentioned, because the truth bears repeating.

I will of course support the Bloc Québécois motion, and I urge all members in this House, particularly those from Quebec, to be realistic and to join us in acknowledging that Canadian federalism cannot be renewed and cannot be reformed. Twenty years after the failure of the Meech Lake accord, which was the umpteenth attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable, it is more clear than ever that the Quebec nation and the Canadian nation have completely opposite views of Quebec's current and future status.

Even now, the Conservative government has insisted on introducing Bill C-12, a bill to amend the electoral map, which would mean that once again, Quebec would have a smaller percentage of representatives in this House. Unfortunately, the Liberals supported this proposal, and lo and behold, even Liberal and Conservative members from Quebec support this bill, which will be detrimental to the interests of the nation they claim to faithfully represent.

This initiative to further reduce Quebec's place in the Canadian system says a lot about the fate that Canada is reserving for the Quebec nation, which is to live as a minority that will become increasingly smaller. Yes, an increasingly smaller minority is all that Canada can offer us for the future.

Beyond all the nice rhetoric used in this House to make us believe that we are considered with a minimum of respect, the polls reveal the real feelings of Canada towards Quebeckers' aspirations. The one that was conducted between March 18 and April 6, to which the hon. member for Saint-Jean referred, shows us once again the harsh reality.

While 73% of Quebeckers want the Canadian Constitution to recognize that Quebec forms a nation, 83% of the respondents in the rest of Canada reject the idea. In other words, only 17% of the Canadian population outside Quebec supports the idea that we, Quebeckers, form a nation and that Canadian public institutions should reflect that reality.

In any case, the willingness of Canadians to find a constitutional arrangement that would be acceptable to Quebec has never been so weak.

When asked if Canada should begin a new round of negotiations to find a satisfactory constitutional agreement for Quebec, 82% of Quebeckers said yes, while 61% of Canadians outside Quebec said no. Similarly, when we talk about negotiating a new division of powers and resources between Quebec and Ottawa to recognize Quebec's special status, close to three out of four Quebeckers, or 73% to be precise, are in favour of the idea, while more than seven out of ten Canadians, or 71%, are opposed to it.

Throughout their history, the protection of the French language and culture has been one of Quebeckers' main concerns. That is truer than ever, as the poll shows. Indeed, 82% of Quebeckers feel that the Quebec government should have more powers to protect the French language and culture on its territory, but almost seven out of ten Canadians, or 69%, oppose the idea.

The gap between the two visions on the linguistic issue is even more glaring when we ask whether the Government of Canada should respect, on the Quebec territory, the provisions of Bill 101, which makes French Quebec's official language.

• (1710)

According to this survey, 90 % of Quebeckers agree, while 74% of Canadians disagree.

I could go on and on about the drastic differences and oppositions between the Quebec outlook and the Canadian outlook which are highlighted in the survey.

Twenty years after the failure of the Meech Lake accord, is it not more evident than ever that it is about time our two nations draw conclusions from these irreconcilable differences?

Allow me to conclude on a more personal note. At the time when the Meech Lake accord failed, I was president of the Montreal Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, which organizes Quebec national holiday celebrations in Montreal. What an extraordinary outpouring of fervour we witnessed on that day, with hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens following the parade down Sherbrooke Street in Montreal.

Business of Supply

The failure of Meech was a test of truth, the kind of truth that is said to set us free. I remember Jean Duceppe, on the evening of the national holiday, shouting to a cheering crowd, "From now on, the future of Quebec will no longer be decided in Newfoundland, Manitoba or elsewhere. It will be decided in QUEBEC, by the QUEBECKERS themselves."

The motion put forward by the Bloc Québécois today contributes further to the propagation of the truth, the truth that will set us free. Long live a sovereign Quebec. Vive le Québec libre.

• (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the supply proceedings.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

• (1740)

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

(Division No. 48)

YEAS

Members

André	Bachand
Beaudin	Bellavance
Bigras	Blais
Bouchard	Brunelle
Cardin	Carrier
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Desnoyers
Dorion	Duceppe
Dufour	Faillie
Freeman	Gagnon
Gaudet	Guay
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Laforest	Laframboise
Lalonde	Lavallée
Lemay	Lessard
Lévesque	Malo
Ménard	Mourani
Nadeau	Ouellet
Paillé (Hochelaga)	Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
Paquette	Plamondon
Pomerleau	St-Cyr
Thi Lac	Vincent — 44

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Anders	Anderson
Andrews	Angus
Armstrong	Arthur
Ashfield	Ashton
Atamanenko	Bagnell
Bains	Baird
Bélanger	Benoit
Bernier	Bevilacqua
Bevington	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Block	Boucher
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brisson
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Brunoogoe
Byrne	Cadman
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannis
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Casson	Charlton
Chong	Chow
Christopherson	Clarke
Clement	Coady
Coderre	Comartin
Cotler	Crombie
Crowder	Cummins
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dechert
Del Mastro	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Donnelly
Dosanjh	Dreeshen
Dryden	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dykstra	Easter
Fast	Finley
Flaherty	Fletcher
Foote	Fry
Galipeau	Gallant
Gameau	Généreux
Glover	Godin
Goldring	Goodale
Goodyear	Gourde
Gravelle	Grewal
Hall Findlay	Harris (St. John's East)
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hiebert
Hill	Hoback
Hoeppner	Holder
Holland	Hughes
Hyer	Jean
Jennings	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Kania
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kennedy	Kennedy (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Layton
Lebel	LeBlanc
Lee	Leslie
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Malhi
Maloway	Mark
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Mayes	McCallum
McColeman	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod
McTeague	Mendes
Menzies	Merrifield
Minna	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Mulcair	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Neville	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor

Private Members' Business

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1745)
[English]

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

The House resumed from April 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-501, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and other Acts (pension protection), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice, at the conclusion of today's debate on Bill C-501, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and other Acts (pension protection), a deferred recorded division be deemed requested, and the vote deferred to immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business on Wednesday, May 26th, 2010.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): 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)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the very first bill I introduced after being elected to the House of Commons in 2006 was a bill that would give wages and pensions super priority in cases of commercial bankruptcy. Since that time the government has adopted much of what was in my bill with respect to securing workers' wages, and I am delighted that happened, but sadly, the government has not yet acted in any way to protect pensions in a similar way. The NDP bill that is before the House today picks up the pension protection piece that is crucial to protecting workers in these uncertain economic times.

Record job losses, the decline of entire industries, and the collapse of large employers are throwing hundreds of thousands of hard-working Canadians out of work. Far too many bankrupt employers are leaving underfunded pension plans in their wake.

Through no fault of their own, workers are thus finding that despite years and years of making pension contributions, they can no longer count on a secure workplace pension. Sadly, this is no longer the exception. With thousands of pensions lost in recent years, and many thousands more under threat, this has become a full-blown pension crisis.

For people who may be watching this in my hometown of Hamilton, there has been a bit of a misinformation campaign launched in our community in an attempt to discredit the provincial NDP. Fortunately, it is spearheaded by only a few and is readily disproved by the facts. The contention is it was the NDP government in Ontario that threw the floodgates wide open for corporations to underfund their pension plans and that is why we are in such difficulty now. That is complete nonsense.

O'Neill-Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Oliphant
Pacetti	Paradis
Patry	Payne
Pearson	Petit
Poilievre	Prentice
Preston	Proulx
Rae	Rafferty
Raitt	Rajotte
Ratansi	Rathgeber
Regan	Reid
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Rodriguez
Rota	Russell
Savage	Savoie
Saxton	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Shea
Siksay	Silva
Simms	Smith
Sorenson	Stanton
Stoffer	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Szabo	Thibeault
Thompson	Tilson
Toews	Tonks
Trost	Tweed
Uppal	Valeriote
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Volpe	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilfert
Wong	Woodworth
Wrzesnewskyj	Yelich
Young	Zarac— 232

PAIRED

Members

Asselin	Bonsant
Bourgeois	Hawn
Komarnicki	Lemieux
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Roy— 8

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

* * *

[English]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing the House that the Senate has passed the following public bill, to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill S-215, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (suicide bombings).

It being 5:44 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

Private Members' Business

Let me set the record straight. It is true that a number of companies approached the government in the early 1990s with a request for pension contribution holidays during what was then a serious recession. The government did approve a limited number of those requests, but only on condition that companies filed detailed plans with hard deadlines for repayment of the plans. Every one of the companies approved by the NDP government met those conditions. Every pension plan was repaid.

Stelco did not apply for its contribution holiday until after Mike Harris came to power in June 1995. Stelco filed its election to pay penalties rather than fund the plan in June 1996. However, the Harris Conservatives allowed that to happen without any requirement that a pension plan repayment schedule be either filed or met. Without such a binding requirement and without any enforcement, underfunded pension plans began to abound in Ontario.

That is how we ended up in the mess that has now become a full-blown pension crisis. I could cite case after case where workers are being left high and dry.

Perhaps the most galling example of recent note is the case of CHTV, where employees in Hamilton watched their underfunded pension plan wind up with an \$8 million deficit. That means a loss of 15% of the money to which they were entitled. I know that to workers at other companies, a 15% pension cut would seem a whole lot better than the cuts they are facing, but the galling part in this case is that Asper's executives at Canwest were given \$41 million to top up their underfunded pension plan before they went into CCAA protection, while workers got not a dime. There is not a fair-minded person in this country who will not find that completely outrageous.

Pensions are not some corporate slush fund. They are deferred wages, and workers have the unequivocal right to collect the benefits which they have helped to finance. Far from pitting one worker against another, the need for pension reform has united workers from coast to coast to coast.

The call for reforms is comprehensive. The bill before us today addresses one part of that. It secures every pension in Canada without costing the Canadian government or Canadian taxpayers a cent. It simply moves unfunded pension liabilities and the shortfalls in pension plans from unsecured status to secured status, and it closes the loopholes that currently allow companies that go into restructuring proceedings to leave their retirees high and dry.

Workplace pensions are just part of the problem, because only one-third of Canadian workers have a workplace pension. Similarly, only a third of Canadians contribute to an RRSP, and those who do just watched billions of dollars in precious savings vaporize over the last year. The current system is leaving too many people without the retirement savings they need. There is too much at risk and not enough security.

In past crises, Canadians have come together to create solutions, to minimize risk by sharing it. That is what we did when we created public health care, and yes, that is what we did when we created the public pensions that are now the only reliable part of our whole retirement security system.

Let us face it, for more than a generation, wages have failed to keep pace with the cost of living and most Canadians have not been able to save what they need.

• (1750)

The best way to help today's workers save enough money for tomorrow is through an improved Canada pension plan, which is why we are proposing that over the next several years we lay the foundation to double CPP benefits for the future.

The CPP has been proven time and again to be a safe, secure and efficient retirement savings plan. Plus, the CPP is portable from job to job, across provinces, keeps up with inflation, and is backed by the government.

Because the CPP operates independently from government, there is no cost to taxpayers. In fact, there is the potential for governments to save over time.

Higher and secure pension savings mean seniors would be less likely to rely on income supports like the guaranteed income supplement or provincial and local social supports for medicine, housing and food.

The cost to workers and employers is small. Over seven years, CPP premiums would only have to rise by .4% each year of pensionable earnings.

We all need to save more for retirement. Putting that little bit extra into the CPP makes more sense than investing it into risky RRSPs. It is safer, easier—in fact, it is effortless—and it earns more.

That kind of reform would be great news, particularly in a country where the rate of seniors living in poverty doubled from 3% in the mid-1990s to 6% in the mid-2000s. The maximum GIS benefit, intended for the lowest income seniors, was approximately \$650 a month in 2009. That is only \$50 more than it was in 2005. The maximum annual old age security and GIS benefits are approximately \$14,000, which is \$4,000 below the poverty line in most cities. In fact, right now there are over one-quarter of a million seniors living in poverty. It is a travesty. We can, and must, lift Canadian seniors out of poverty, and the easiest way to do that is by improving the GIS.

If we enhanced the guaranteed income supplement so that no senior would have to live in poverty, it would cost the government \$700 million. That might seem like a huge amount of money, but when we look at it in the context of the last budget, it is a drop in the bucket. The government spent \$6 billion just on maintaining its tax breaks for Canada's wealthiest corporations. This is not about a program costing too much. This is all about a government that cares more about its wealthy friends than it cares about the people who built our country. Conservative MPs should be ashamed of themselves.

If they got their heads out of the tar sands long enough to actually notice what is happening in communities across our country, they would realize that by denying seniors an adequate standard of living they are also denying them hope.

Let me quote the National Council of Welfare which said, "Poverty is not just a lack of income; it can also be a synonym for social exclusion. When people cannot meet their basic needs, they cannot afford even simple activities, such as inviting family or friends to dinner occasionally or buying gifts for a child or grandchild. Poverty leads to isolation and social exclusion, which in turn lead to other problems, such as poor health, depression and dysfunction. Poverty can quickly deprive individuals of their dignity, confidence and hope".

What message are we sending to seniors when we refuse to lift them up to the poverty line? This is not good public policy. It is not even good fiscal management. It is simply mean-spirited and hopelessly shortsighted. As we know now, it is also flouting a decision taken by Parliament.

When the NDP introduced a comprehensive motion on pension reform in the House of Commons last year, that motion included increasing the GIS, strengthening the CPP, and shoring up workplace pensions. That motion passed with a majority vote in the House of Commons.

When the Prime Minister was in opposition he said, "the government is duty bound to respect the decisions made by the House of Commons". The Prime Minister said that in May 2005 when he was the leader of the opposition. Well, he is in government now and it is time for him to walk the talk. He should accept that he is duty bound to respect the decisions made by the House of Commons and act on pension reform now. Seniors and hard-working Canadians deserve nothing less.

• (1755)

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to join my colleagues in speaking to the issue of pensions and income security of Canadians in retirement. In particular, I wish to address the actions already taken by the government to provide protection for the claims of pensioners in insolvency and how these actions are consistent with or exceed the protection provided by other countries under their insolvency laws.

Let me begin by acknowledging the challenges faced by Canadian pensioners and their families during the recent economic downturn. This government understands the issues and considers them extremely important. It is for that reason that we have taken and continue to take measures that will better protect pensions and

Private Members' Business

pensioners, whether it be in a bankruptcy or company restructuring context, in the context of overall retirement adequacy, or in the more general context of how the national economy is doing.

Let me also acknowledge the specific challenges created for pensioners when a company files for bankruptcy under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, BIA, or restructuring under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, CCAA. Such proceedings have an impact on both current and former employees, as well as on the interests of creditors and stakeholders.

The concerns of employees and pensioners who find themselves in the insolvency process cannot be minimized. They have followed the rules. They have made their pension payments. But as a result of the insolvency of their employer, in some instances, they find themselves facing the prospect of reduced pensions.

The protection of pensions where an employer becomes insolvent is a significant element of our existing economic infrastructure. When considering the protection of pensions or any other obligation, it is important to recognize that both the BIA and the CCAA are fundamental marketplace framework laws that play an important part in maintaining Canada's economic well-being. They both set out rules for how individuals and companies may become bankrupt or may restructure their affairs.

It is always unfortunate when individuals or businesses find themselves in the position of being unable to meet their obligations. The economic reality of insolvency is that the creditors and stakeholders of an insolvent business that is no longer viable will receive less than what they are owed.

The insolvency system serves a vital economic purpose by allowing for a fair and orderly treatment of creditors, generally in accordance with the legal rights and obligations that were in place before the insolvency, as well as the fair treatment of the insolvent person or business.

In light of these principles, the government has already taken action to protect the claims of pensioners in insolvency. In recent years amendments were made to Canada's insolvency legislation, both the BIA and CCAA, to provide a higher priority for outstanding regular pension contributions.

This means that unpaid regular contributions are now paid ahead of secured creditors in bankruptcy proceedings under the BIA. In the case of a restructuring under CCAA, a restructuring plan cannot be approved by the court unless the plan provides for the repayment of unpaid regular contributions.

In the consideration of Bill C-501, where we are talking about giving super priority status to unfunded pension plan liabilities, we must assess the potential impact of such changes on the economy as a whole.

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Unfunded pension liabilities are made up of the deficit between existing pension assets and the obligations to pay benefits to pensioners. Unfunded liabilities can occur as a result of poor market performance, even if all required regular contributions have been made.

To emphasize the point, the BIA and the CCAA are both important marketplace laws that potentially impact economic activity and business decisions of all sectors of the economy. Lenders, investors, suppliers, landlords, employees and customers, all make decisions based in part on the consequences that may ensue if a business were to become insolvent. Any changes to insolvency legislation should be approached with the effects on all of these players in mind.

When considering the protection of pensions through the use of the insolvency system, it is worth remembering that Canada is not alone in dealing with this issue. The practises of other countries can provide useful guidance in consideration of potential solutions.

As a result of the economic downturn and changing demographics, countries around the world are examining how to respond to the challenge of financing secure retirements for their citizens. Given the shared international challenge, it would be instructive to consider how pension claims are treated in bankruptcy in other major countries, and compare Canada's treatment of such claims in bankruptcy with that of countries with similar economies.

● (1800)

Clearly, any comparison will not be exact. Some countries, such as Italy and France, have mainly state-funded pensions and few private employer-sponsored pensions, which make the insolvency of contributing employers largely irrelevant to the amount received by pensioners.

Other countries, like New Zealand, treat pension claims as wage claims, giving claimants access to wage guarantee funds instead of protection in the bankruptcy process.

Still others, like the United States and the United Kingdom, have pension guarantee funds, financed by premiums or general tax revenues.

Bearing in mind these differences, it is very significant to note that Canada is one of the few countries among the members of the G20 and the 30 members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, or the OECD, that grant a super priority for outstanding pension contributions. Among OECD members, only Canada, Japan and Poland provide for such a super priority. The other countries have a preferred or unsecured claim, providing for a lower degree of protection than Canada.

However, with respect to the protection of unfunded liabilities, like Canada, a large majority of members of the OECD, including such countries as Australia, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, treat unfunded pension liabilities as unsecured claims in insolvency.

This government has taken measures to better protect pensions through amendments to the BIA and CCAA, with the steps already taken being more protective of pension claims than that of most economically advanced countries.

The government, consistent with its throne speech commitment to better protect workers whose employers go bankrupt, is looking at broader issues and exploring comprehensive solutions, both inside and outside of insolvency law, to protect pensions and enhance the security of incomes for Canadians in retirement.

A further response to the complex equations implicit in pension discussions will be carefully balanced to do the most good for pensioners while continuing to protect the health of our economy as a whole.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-501, which was introduced by my colleague. He has analyzed the problem correctly and I think that he is introducing the remedy that is required for the moment.

It is amazing to me that we have found ourselves in this place, given what we and our parents have gone through since the Great Depression of 1929 and on. Our parents went through the Great Depression and came out of it. It took perhaps 30 years for the stock market to recover. By that time, anyone who held stocks was likely to find that the companies they held the stocks in were never to come back.

One would have thought, given the situation out of that recession, that people would have thought ahead and come to the conclusion that we had to work out an insurance scheme for the retirement plans themselves. It only makes sense. If we look at historical records, we will find that companies rarely last for huge amounts of time. We have situations where consumer tastes change. We have obsolescence in companies. Just plain bad management of companies leads companies to fall into tough times.

Workers and their representatives had an undying trust that they would somehow put their money into a pension plan and be able to have the benefits last until the end of their lives. This trust came at a time when there was a lot of optimism on the part of the workers. I also think that when young workers start, they rarely question the pension plan. Whether they are in unions or not, I think most people will agree that it is only when people get to be middle age that they really start to take a deep interest and question what their pension plans are all about and whether the money is going to be there.

Previous speakers have indicated already that we have a patchwork quilt of pension benefits across the country. I believe that only 33% of people have taken advantage of the RRSP program. Only another rather small percentage of people actually have a company pension. Of those, some have the defined benefit plans. Those have peaked and they are not increasing in numbers at all. If anything, they are decreasing over time. Those are the best plans, the Cadillac plans, that came around in the 1950s and 1960s. Those are more or less at an end in terms of their expansion.

Now we are seeing the defined contribution plan taking over. That type of plan is not as good as the defined benefit plans were. Through all of this, I fail to see why successive governments and workers' organizations themselves were not calling for an insurance plan for pension plans as early as the 1960s, knowing what we know can happen and does happen over time to the economy. I can point out other industries that have formed their own compensation plans or insurance plans.

• (1805)

All we have to do is look at the P and C, property and casualty, insurance companies. In 1987, I believe, after several bankruptcies of small P and C companies in Canada, the industry realized that this was bad for business to have a house insurance company go bankrupt and leave people stuck without having the claims paid and the premiums not returned. I could mention some names of some companies, but I will not do that now. It was a long process and at the end of it the companies decided this was a big enough risk that they got together with the governments, or vice versa, and they formed a pool. The P and C companies now have a pool so that if someone's house insurance company goes bankrupt and goes out of business, this pool steps in and there is an orderly wind-down of the company and the policies. As a matter of fact, it is so painless that the public does not even notice it is happening.

The same is true of the life insurance industry. It has a similar type of pooling structure. We have had travel acts in Ontario, in Quebec and in B.C. now for a number of years. Consumers in those provinces know, when they buy airline tickets, that if their agency or tour operator goes bankrupt, like Conquest Vacations did last February, that they are protected. There are provinces like my own, Manitoba, that do not have their own travel fund. They are not protected at all, but the consumers in Ontario, Quebec and B.C. are.

I was at a Canada-U.S. conference in New Orleans on the weekend. We were given a briefing on the oil spill on Sunday morning. They talked about the potential for the worst-case scenario and there is a fund set up for a limited liability of \$100 million for oil spills, and the companies pay into this fund. Of course, if there is a case of an oil spill that exceeds the amount, or if the liability is determined that the company was negligent, of course it could be unlimited liability.

Potentially a company like BP, very healthy only a few weeks ago, might end up in a bankruptcy situation in the future. All the shareholders who thought things were going fine two weeks ago would lose their money, and the workers at BP would be in a similar situation to some of the workers we are looking at here, such as those from Nortel.

These are not isolated examples. They happen in the economy all the time, so the question is: Why can we not look forward and take precautions when we know it is going to happen? We are going to have workers who have paid into pension plans for many years and through no fault of their own are going to have a deficiency in what they can draw.

• (1810)

Bear in mind that the workers are not running the companies. It is the management that is running the companies. It is management that is making the bad business decisions that get companies occasionally

Private Members' Business

into trouble. Then we have a situation when the company is going into bankruptcy, when the management ends up looking after itself. It was mentioned by the previous speaker that Canwest is an example. Management took \$41 million to take care of itself.

The public gets outraged when it sees that happen. I know the member for Winnipeg Centre is listening right now and I can just see a speech starting to develop over this issue, because people see this happening. They see that management takes care of itself and the workers are the ones who are left holding the bag.

It is time we passed this bill and moved the workers to the front of the line.

• (1815)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to join in the debate on Bill C-501. I should point out I am not rising to speak just because I was challenged to do so by my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona. I have a legitimate and longstanding interest in the subject matter.

I want to begin by complimenting and thanking my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River for bringing forward Bill C-501 on the subject of workers' pensions or the status of pensions in the event of bankruptcy.

We should start by recognizing the magnitude of the problem. There are more than 10,000 commercial bankruptcies per year in this country. In fact, that number is probably two or three years old. The number is probably higher, given the economic turndown we have seen happen in recent years.

Of those 10,000 commercial bankruptcies per year, there is over \$2 billion in lost wages and benefits when employees are left holding the bag. In the current Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, wages, back wages and pension contributions rank dead last in order of priority for those claimants waiting to be paid when the assets of the bankrupt company are liquidated by the trustees of the bankruptcy.

A lot of people were surprised to learn that working people, ordinary Canadians, would rank dead last in priority. In fact, if we can trace it back through the NDP, the origins of the bill actually germinated in the riding of Winnipeg Centre, I can say with some modesty.

A number of my constituents, in 2002, came to me with the details of a bankruptcy going on in Winnipeg at the time, involving Storm-Tite doors and the United Steelworkers of America. The bankruptcy was taking place and not only were a bunch of employees owed back wages but the pension plan was in deficit by tens of millions of dollars. They were not able to meet the actuarial promises to the beneficiaries of the plan.

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They came to me, shocked to learn that they were ranked so poorly in terms of priority when the trustees of the bankruptcy liquidated the company and that their pensions would be cut. Not only were some pensions cut in half, but some 20-year members would have no pension at all even though, when the assets of the company were liquidated, there were tens of millions of dollars left in assets, more than enough to make the pension plan whole. In other words, other creditors were secured, but the workers were not.

This led to an initiative that we called the workers first bill. We took it to Parliament and we had some co-operation from the Liberal government of the day. We met at length with Joe Fontana, the former minister of labour, and we negotiated and negotiated to try to correct what we thought was a horrible problem with the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act.

The push-back was not from business owners or the corporate community, because frankly if they are at the point where their business is bankrupt and they have walked away from the company, they do not really care what happens to the division of the remaining liquidated assets. In fact, many would be pleased if that money went to their employees rather than to other creditors. No, the push-back came from the banks. The banks said if they were not number one on the list of secured creditors in the event of a bankruptcy, if the debt to them was not prioritized as number one, they would never lend venture capital again. They were not going to lend money to business if they could not be guaranteed they would be paid back first. That is where the push-back came from.

Again ordinary Canadians were frustrated, and we started to do a great deal of research around the country to find out the extent of the problem. We traced the origin of the problem. The real origin of the problem was the fact that so many Canadian pension plans are underfunded, as my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona was saying, not just by the 10% that is contemplated by the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, but by 30%, 40% and 50%, because there has been no aggressive and diligent policing of the enforcement of the legislation surrounding pensions. It was at the point where, as soon as private companies started getting into trouble, as my colleague pointed out, they were dipping into the pension plan as a last-ditch effort to try to find some operating capital to keep the company and the plant going for another year or two.

• (1820)

Again, if pensions had joint trustees, this would not happen. However, many of these pension plans are in the absolute control of the company and the company just cannot keep its fingers out of that pool of dough, especially when the going gets tough and it is has a problem. Conrad Black, with Dominion stores, is a classic example. He was taken to court because he took \$80 million out of the pension plan of employees and never put it back.

I am proud we are at this juncture in Parliament today.

Some progress was made in the treatment of back wages owing to workers in this initiative. When we did raise the workers first bill, we did get the co-operation of the Liberal government of the day to put in place a special super priority fund for up to \$3,000 for back wages payable to employees, so they would get super priority. That was a huge benefit. The \$3,000 was adequate. If a guy has not been paid wages for two or three weeks or a month, he probably will quit the

job anyway. About 95% of claimants were owed less than \$3,000 and would get satisfaction from that fund. I am glad to say progress was made on that front.

The big problem remaining is not the guy who is owed \$1,500 or one two-week back pay cheque. The problem is some of these pensions are underfunded by \$10 million, \$30 million and \$50 million. When a company goes bankrupt, the pensioner, who has worked all his or her life in good faith and whose pension has been held as deferred wages on his or her behalf by the company, finds out the money is not there.

We had one example in New Brunswick. There were over \$100 million in assets in the company when it was liquidated. It had a great deal of high-tech machinery and property and buildings that were of significant value. The pension shortfall was \$40 million. We brought some of these people to Ottawa to plead their case with the government of the day. There was more than enough money in the assets of the company, when liquidated, to make this pension plan whole. We had examples of workers who had 32 years of service and they did not get one nickel in pension.

This was the tragedy in real terms. The effect is overwhelming when we consider 10,000 bankruptcies per year and over \$2 billion in back wages per year that should have gone into the pockets of the employees in the company. I would argue that most business owners would rather the moneys realized from liquidating the assets go to their employees as a gesture of good faith as the company wraps up and is closed.

Bill C-501 would address this measure. I know there is broad interest and support from the other parties. If we do nothing else in this session of Parliament, we hope we make Canadian workers who suffer bankruptcies whole in their pension savings and in their retirement security by passing Bill C-501.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to close debate on my private member's bill, Bill C-501, and thank the House for the opportunity to do so.

The legislative process at times can be messy. We know this and we have seen it with other business presently before the House. However, we also know that sometimes, when there is a common interest and a shared commitment among parties, such as between the Liberals and Conservatives on HST, we know that legislation can pass through this place and the other place in as little as four days.

Bearing that in mind, on June 16, less than a year ago, every member of every party in the House passed a motion that said they fundamentally shared a desire with the NDP to:

—ensuring that workers' pension funds go to the front of the line of creditors in the event of bankruptcy proceedings...

The Liberal block and, yes, the members who sit with the Conservative government agreed that pension funds must go to the front of the line when a company entered bankruptcy.

Bill C-501 is a simple bill, straightforward, that respects and fulfills the unanimous desire of all parliamentarians in this place to put pension funds at the front of the line when the company enters bankruptcy. If members support this objective, then they will support my bill and vote to send it to committee. If a party opposes the bill, then it is going back on its word and misleading Canadians. It is really that simple.

Today the Conservative government appears to be sliding back on its word or on its commitment to more than 4.7 million Canadian families who worry every day about their retirement income. The Conservative government and its members, who are planning to vote against Bill C-501 or who are trying to stop the bill by other frivolous means, are slaves to an outdated ideology that says we must put the vultures and the shadowy backroom financiers, like those who used to work at Lehman Brothers and those who still work at Goldman Sachs, ahead of hard-working Canadian men and women who have earned their wages, who have earned their pensions and who have earned a dignified retirement.

The Bloc Québécois members have stood by the commitment they made to working Canadians last June and have indicated they will support the bill. I thank them for their support and I hope they will prove to be reliable supporters throughout the legislative process.

The Liberals have made similar noises, but in the past have proven to be unreliable when it comes to supporting workers' rights or progressive bills or motions for that matter. I remind the Liberal caucus that in finance committee on March 25, the Liberal finance critic, the member for Markham—Unionville, said:

—the pensions critic for the Liberals, and myself as finance critic, will be recommending that the Liberal Party support the NDP private member's bill on amendments to the BIA, as and when it comes to the House of Commons.

I thanked the hon. member at that time for his remarks. I remind him and his Liberal colleagues today that words mean nothing if they are not accompanied by deeds.

However, the Liberals do appear to have come around to the New Democrat position that pension security must be among the highest priorities in Parliament. I thank Liberals for their support, if it is forthcoming for the bill, but I remind them that in the end they will be held accountable by the voters for their actions.

It must be said again that each and every member of this place must live up to the commitment that they made to millions of Canadians on June 16, 2009 and that they must vote now to send Bill C-501 to committee, where it can be properly examined, debated and perhaps even amended as need be.

I thank the members of the House who have shared their thoughts, concerns and support for Bill C-501 during this debate. I urge them to live up to their commitment on pension security and pass this bill unanimously.

• (1825)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to an order made earlier today the question on the motion for second reading of Bill C-501, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act

Adjournment Proceedings

and other Acts (pension protection), is deemed put and the recorded division is deemed requested and deferred to immediately before the time provided for private members' business on Wednesday, May 26.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, a few short weeks ago I asked the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development about her office's obstruction of an information request about a \$5 million advertising campaign during the Olympics. As I said at the time, the media had a simple question, department officials had the answer and the minister's office intervened and hid the truth. The minister, in her response, stated:

We will be taking a look at this example and taking it into consideration to see how we can improve our processes in the future.

However, what has she done to improve that process? Based on her statements since, it seems that political control of information is even more rigid than we could have imagined. While appearing at the ethics committee this week, the minister stated that her office vetted everything government departments told reporters. So much for open and transparent government.

How far does this extend? If a reporter asks the department a simple question such as where Tim Hortons is, does it have to go to her political staff to get the answer?

The government has many trained communications staff to deal with media requests, whether complex or simple. The ministers in the government need to let them do their job without interference. In fact, the Privy Council Office was before the operations committee yesterday. It told us that it had hired an additional 20 communications experts under the economic action plan.

The minister's entire approach is not in principle with an open and transparent government. It seems as though on access to information requests and requests for information from journalists, the government's first instinct is to release as little information as possible, as late as possible and as incomplete as possible.

The Information Commissioner recently reported that access to information has reached a "red alert" level in some departments and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada received a "C" rating. In addition, the Information Commissioner is undertaking a systemic investigation to examine whether political interference in the processing of access requests is a cause of delay or unduly restricts disclosure under the act.

Adjournment Proceedings

As we saw even today at the ethics committee, a political employee in the office of the Minister of Natural Resources, for example, could not even recall if he interfered with access to information requests more than once.

His colleague in the office of the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development is set to appear in front of the same committee on Thursday to address the exact issues I raised in my question. I hope he can explain not only to our colleagues on the committee but to all Canadians why they should not have been told that the government was spending nearly \$5 million on self-promotion around the time of the Olympics.

Since the minister seems to embrace the notion that all requests need to be vetted before information is given to journalists, I am not terribly confident there will be an admission that political interference is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Again, what new measures will the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and the Prime Minister implement to ensure information is given to the media, that access to information is given to all Canadians, members of Parliament and everyone? So far we have only heard the minister's endorsement of political interference.

• (1830)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity today to clarify the facts of this issue, facts that the Liberal member is purposely ignoring in an attempt to score cheap political points.

First, I would like to clarify something. In the member's original question, she claimed that this was an access to information request. It was not. It was a routine media inquiry.

A reporter contacted the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada requesting information on the economic action plan help for workers ad campaign that ran during the Olympics two days before the ad campaign was completed. He specifically asked for two things: the cost and the frequency of the ads.

Ad campaigns are unique in that they do not have fixed costs. It is impossible to respond to the question of frequency of ads before an ad campaign is over. There are a lot of reasons as to why the number of ads that are aired usually differ from what was estimated and budgeted. It is also important to point out that the cost of an ad campaign depends on the frequency of the advertisements. As the frequency cannot be known until after an ad campaign is over, obviously the accurate cost cannot be known either.

As soon as the ad campaign ended, the frequency was actually known and the more accurate costs were available. That information was provided to the person who requested it. This was the prudent and responsible thing to do. Again, accurate information was provided in a timely manner.

I would also like to point out that all the rules and guidelines under the Government of Canada's communications policy were followed. Those are the facts.

I continue to be disappointed by the Liberals and the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl. They keep distorting facts and going on fishing expeditions instead of doing what our Conservative

government is doing, which is working on the issues that actually matter to Canadians and constituents like hers and mine, important issues like the economy and creating jobs, keeping families safe but keeping criminals off the street, improving employment insurance, protecting consumers at the pumps, creating jobs through investments in infrastructure, and cutting taxes so hard-working Canadians can keep more of their money to spend on things that matter the most.

Those are the issues that Canadians care about. They elected us not to play partisan games but to work on issues that are important to them and to their families.

I have already stated that all of the rules were followed in responding to the media request in question.

• (1835)

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Mr. Speaker, I am actually disappointed with the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour for not given responding to my question.

My question was about political interference. We now have a committee of the House looking into political interference. The Information Commissioner is looking into political interference. In the member's response, he certainly did not indicate that they were concerned about this issue and about the fact that there might have been some political interference.

The media made a simple request to get information about how much money was spent during the Olympics for a particular program. Surely the department, with all of its skill, was looking at how much money it would spend, where it would spend it and how it would spend it. I am sure the member would agree that this kind of planning and involvement by the department is essential.

I will again ask my question. Is he or is he not concerned with political interference in these requests?

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Speaker, as I have already stated, all of the rules were followed in responding to the media request in question. As soon as the ad campaign ended, accurate information was available and it was provided. The prudent and responsible approach was taken.

I would like to ask the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl and the Liberal leader to stop these ridiculous fishing expeditions, start listening to their constituents and start focusing on what matters most to Canadians.

Adjournment Proceedings

I would ask if her and her leader will support our Conservative government's ongoing efforts to strengthen our economy and create jobs. Will they support our efforts to keep families safe by keeping violent offenders off the street? Will they support our efforts to strengthen the employment insurance system?

Those are the issues that Canadians care about and I suggest that the member should start paying more attention to what matters to her constituents.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and discuss the issue that I attempted to raise in question period on March 4, 2010. My question at the time was for the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and it concerned the new citizenship guide that had come out in the fall.

Reports had just come out on the new citizenship guide. The bureaucrats and public servants, after doing all the work of consultations with experts, et cetera, had prepared a draft guide. When it was finalized, it went to the minister and the minister ordered that a reference to equal civil marriage rights for same-sex couples be removed.

When I raised this with the minister, the minister's response was that x, y and z were also not mentioned and that the previous guide, which was published under the previous Liberal government, made zero mention of gays and lesbians, women's voting rights, equality of men and women or aboriginal residential schools, and he went on. He is perfectly right. The previous citizenship guide that was published under the Liberal government did not make those references.

That guide, if I am not mistaken, was published some 15 or 16 years ago. Society evolves and the values of society also evolve. It was the public servants, through their consultations, who felt that the reference to equal civil marriage rights for same-sex couples should be an important part of the new guide that was coming forward in the third millennium, in the 21st century, given how Canadian society had evolved and given our notions of democracy, equality and the impact of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I will not apologize for shortcomings that may have existed in the previous citizenship guide. In fact, when that was first published, my understanding is that there were no criticisms of it for not mentioning certain things. However, as we hit the third millennium, issues were being raised about how it was not fully representative of our modern democracy and how Canadians see themselves.

I was quite dismayed by the answer from the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism because it sounded to me like a child saying, "So and so is not any better and that excuses my behaviour". The minister deliberately had the reference removed. I think it was unjust and it should not have happened. I wonder what the minister's motives were for doing that.

• (1840)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to the question by the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, the government determined that the previous guide introduced 15 long years ago lacked

important information about Canada's history, military contributions, symbols, values and institutions, all things that newcomers need to know to develop a better understanding of and a stronger attachment to Canada.

The new guide, *Discover Canada*, has been endorsed and celebrated across the spectrum as a great reflection of this country's history, geography and values. For example, the *Ottawa Citizen* stated, "*Discover Canada* is a marked improvement over its predecessor. It's readable and interesting and includes a detailed section on Canadian history...It also shows more respect for immigrants by giving them a more complete picture of the country they've chosen as their own. The old guide whitewashed Canadian history and politics...All Canadians, whether born here or not, could probably learn a thing or two from this guide. No attempt to summarize this country's culture, politics and history in a few dozen pages will ever please everyone, but *Discover Canada* is a worthy effort".

As we have said, many respected Canadians helped us write the study guide. Each one of the authors and historians contributed his or her expertise and unique perspectives on Canada. All input was considered as part of the challenge of capturing Canada's history, identity and values in one document.

Readers of today's new study guide will find it more inclusive. It contains information on significant aspects of our history that were missing in the previous version, including Confederation, responsible government and Canadian democracy.

It also now features efforts by women to achieve the right to vote, or the women's suffrage movement, as well as expanded sections on Canadian heroes such as Terry Fox, Rick Hansen, Sir Frederick Banting, winners of the Victoria Cross, Louis Riel and Sam Steele.

It mentions the Québécois nation and the quiet revolution for the first time, and the French Canadian culture that flourished in Canada's postwar years. It exposes new Canadians to Canadian artists such as Bill Reid, Jean-Paul Riopelle, the Group of Seven, Denys Arcand and others.

The new guide recognizes gay and lesbian Canadians. It also contains references to slavery and abolition and the impact of residential schools on aboriginal peoples.

It recognizes that 110,000 Canadians gave their lives in two world wars and it talks about Remembrance Day.

This guide exposes readers to these and other aspects of our Canadian history for the first time since the guide was created in 1995.

The Globe and Mail said:

Canada has been shortchanging Canadian immigrants preparing for their citizenship tests with a bad guidebook. The federal government's newly revised preparatory booklet distributed to test-takers...is a welcome move that places a new and appropriate emphasis on Canada's history and personalities....

[T]he new guide shows how the country is special, and does so with vigour. In telling Canada's stories, and the conflict, characters and challenges therein, it will enhance new Canadians' attachment to their country.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Government of Canada is committed to promoting and strengthening the value of Canadian citizenship. We are making Canadian citizenship meaningful so that hundreds of thousands of new Canadians can better understand the values, symbols and institutions that have shaped our great country.

This guide is a big improvement on its predecessor and we will update it as required.

I would conclude by adding that *Discover Canada* is not the only way to communicate with newcomers. In fact, a publication many newcomers receive upon their arrival, *Welcome to Canada*, is being updated and it includes a specific reference to the rights of gays and lesbians to marry.

• (1845)

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, that does not take away from the fact that internal department documents show that an early draft prepared by public servants after extensive consultation contained the following references: homosexuality was decriminalized in 1969; the Charter of Rights and Freedoms forbids discrimination based on sexual orientation; and same-sex marriage was legalized in 2005. The minister had all of these statements.

The wonderful things that are in the publication do not take away from the fact that those internal documents also show that the minister ordered the sections the public servants had put in the first draft of the citizenship guide to be removed and that after the minister ordered them to be removed, the deputy minister in August 2009 recommended that they be inserted.

Canadians are proud of their country and they are proud of the rights given to all Canadians regardless of their sexual orientation.

I am again dismayed by the attitude of the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, the previous inadequate study guide for Canadian citizenship was rewritten with a broader and stronger focus on the history and institutions of Canada and our military contributions.

The new guide is more comprehensive in scope and its focus is on the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship. We hope this new emphasis reinforces that citizenship is a two-way street.

As I have said, while this guide is a big improvement on its predecessor, no such document can ever be perfect, and we will update it as required.

Once again, *Discover Canada* is not the only way to communicate with newcomers. A publication many newcomers receive upon their arrival, *Welcome to Canada*, is currently being updated and it includes a specific reference to the right of gays and lesbians to marry.

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 12, I rose in the House to get some clarification on the Jaffer affair, more specifically the subsidies from a certain green fund.

The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities avoided the question, which is what this Conservative government does when it has something to hide from Canadians. There is something fishy going on. Why else are we missing some of the documents?

Why did the former Minister for the Status of Women, the former Minister of Natural Resources and the current Minister of Natural Resources not testify before the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates? This is a serious situation since a minister was stripped of her responsibilities and dismissed. The Prime Minister also kicked her out of the Conservative caucus. She is even being dropped as the candidate for her own riding.

This former minister maintains that she does not know the nature of the allegations that prompted the Prime Minister to call in the RCMP to investigate her conduct. All these actions suggest that some serious misdeeds were committed and the public has the right to know what happened.

Since the Conservatives took office, we have all noticed that their leader revels in a culture of secrecy. However, Canadians have a right to know what all these omissions and this sidestepping are hiding. Even the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is said to have used a large fund for green energy, of which a significant amount may have been given to a business of which her son-in-law is the vice-president.

What funds are we talking about? We are all referring to the green infrastructure fund, which is managed by the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, and which is a \$1 billion program.

Rahim Jaffer, who is a former member of this honourable House and the husband of the expelled minister and political caucus orphan, is said to have told a group of business people that his company could help clients get public funds. He said, in the April 8 edition of the *Toronto Star*, that he could easily get money and that he also had access to a green fund.

Mr. Jaffer and Patrick Glémaud, his partner in Green Power Generation Corporation, are said to have met the parliamentary secretary responsible for approving projects for the green infrastructure fund. These two individuals seemingly presented three projects to the parliamentary secretary, who had the authority to approve or deny funding to the corporations that Mr. Jaffer was representing, no doubt as a lobbyist.

The Conservatives used a loophole in the Lobbying Act that allowed parliamentary secretaries to meet lobbyists in secret. The Liberals helped correct that flaw by supporting a motion putting an end to the powers that the Conservatives were using to help their friends.

The current Minister of Natural Resources and the former Minister of Natural Resources, who are the primary managers of the government's green energy fund, refuse to testify before the House of Commons regarding their involvement in the Jaffer case. Mr. Jaffer's partner, Patrick Glémaud, has cooperated fully with the Department of Natural Resources.

Did the Prime Minister tell his ministers not to testify? What do the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Natural Resources have to hide?

• (1850)

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we see here from my friend from Hull—Aylmer is a typical example of a Liberal approach to question period. That is where the Liberals try to create a scandal where no scandal exists. They have been on this tactic for the last several weeks, but I have to admit that it is getting a little wearisome to me and I am sure to most Canadians.

What we have done is exhibit quite clearly to both the member opposite and his Liberal colleagues, as well as all Canadians, that we did not give any funding whatsoever to Mr. Jaffer or his business partner for any of their initiatives. That is a far cry from the approach that the former Liberal government took when it was in power. During the sponsorship scandal, the approach that the Liberal Party took was simply to give money to Liberal supporters who did absolutely no work for that money, and then those supporters would transfer that money back into the Liberal Party coffers.

That, in essence, is the sponsorship scandal. It cost Canadian taxpayers millions of dollars. People went to jail for that. It was the biggest political scandal in Canadian parliamentary history. The most egregious thing about that is that there are still \$39 million that cannot be accounted for.

We have asked consistently for the Liberals to explain where that money went. Second, are they willing to repay that money to Canadian taxpayers? They do not comment on that. They ignore the questions, and that exhibits the true difference between the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party in this Parliament.

When we are accused by the Liberals of doing something untoward in terms of lobbying practices, we can point out quite correctly and quite clearly, we paid no money to any lobbyists, whether they be registered or unregistered. We gave no government funds to people that they accuse of being duplicitous.

The Liberals cannot make that same claim because when they were in government, they gave millions of dollars to their Liberal friends who then funnelled that money back into the Liberal Party. That was the largest scandal. That was fraud. It was despicable then. It is despicable now.

Adjournment Proceedings

I ask the member opposite to please explain finally to all Canadians, what happened to that missing \$39 million? Will they own up to it? Will they repay it to Canadian taxpayers?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Jaffer admitted having access to a green fund. It is public knowledge that the administrator of the green infrastructure fund is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and that green energy is the responsibility of the Minister of Natural Resources.

Who did Mr. Jaffer and his partner meet with? Did he meet with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, the former or the current natural resources minister, or all of them?

We know that Mr. Jaffer or his partner lobbied seven agencies and departments. We also know that Natural Resources Canada gave more than \$342 million to TransAlta Keephills.

When will these ministers and parliamentary secretaries testify and be accountable to Canadians for the funds allocated from the green infrastructure fund?

• (1855)

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, anyone can make claims that they have access to government or government funds. The proof is in the results. Did Mr. Jaffer receive any government funding whatsoever? The answer is, no.

Contrast that again to how the Liberals operated when they were in government, illegally diverting money from the government, from taxpayers, into the Liberal Party coffers via their friends. That is a huge difference.

On one hand we have an ethical Conservative government and on the other hand we have a former government, which was anything but ethical.

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 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:56 p.m.)

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