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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, March 10, 2011

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 10, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 22 petitions.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to two reports from interparliamentary delegations.

First, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the 2010 annual session held in Warsaw, Poland from November 12-16, 2010.

Second, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the visit of the Defence and Security Committee held in Afghanistan from October 24-27, 2010.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources.

In accordance with its order of reference of Tuesday, February 8, the committee has considered votes 1(c), 5(c), 15(c) and 25(c) under Natural Resources in the supplementary estimates (C) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011, and reports the same.

CANADA POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-635, An Act to establish criteria and conditions in respect of funding for post-secondary education programs in order to ensure the quality, accessibility, public administration and accountability of those programs.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in the House to present my bill. This bill, known as the Canada post-secondary education act, is about establishing a vision for our country whereby the federal government works with the provinces to establish a post-secondary education program that looks toward our future and toward assisting our students and our young people in creating a much brighter future for all of us.

[*Translation*]

Whereas the Parliament of Canada recognizes that post-secondary education has an important role in the economic, social, cultural and political development of Canada.

[*English*]

Also, the post-secondary act, akin to the Canada Health Act, would guarantee accountable, stable federal transfers for post-secondary education and would enshrine the principles of accessibility and quality for Canadian students.

At a time when Canadian students and young people across our country are finding it increasingly difficult to afford their education and to achieve opportunities in our economy, it is essential that the federal government show leadership by working with the provinces to look out for them and to establish a way that accessible and affordable education can be there for all.

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

* * *

•(1010)

MARINE MAMMAL REGULATIONS

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-636, An Act respecting the Marine Mammal Regulations (seal fishery observation licence).

Routine Proceedings

He said: Mr. Speaker, our government supports the legitimate economic activities of all Canadians, and that includes the 6,000 Canadian families who derive part of their income from the sealing industry. Whether it is opening new markets or protecting traditional ones, Canadian sealers know our government has their back.

The bill I am introducing today is about protecting our sealers on the very ice where they conduct the seal hunt. In fact, in 2008 the Canadian Coast Guard had to seize a vessel and arrest European activists who were putting sealers' lives at risk by coming dangerously close to the hunt. This practice was breaking up the ice floe under which our sealers' feet tread while they are trying to conduct the hunt.

Canadian sealers have nothing to hide from legitimate observers. However, for dangerous radicals like this, with the stated aim not of observing the seal hunt but of disrupting the seal hunt, this bill proposes to amend the marine mammal regulations to increase the distance these individuals can get to the hunt.

It is about protecting our sealers, and it is the right thing to do.
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

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**PUBLIC TRANSIT OPERATORS PROTECTION ACT
(BREGG'S LAW)**

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-637, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (public transit operators).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure today to introduce my first ever private member's bill. If passed, the legislation would amend the Criminal Code to make the fact that a public transit operator who is the victim of an assault, an aggravating circumstance for purposes of sentencing. The legislation would give added protection to public transit operators.

Sadly, these types of assaults endanger not only the life and safety of the public transit operators, but also the lives and safety of their passengers and anybody who happens to be in the vicinity of the vehicle.

This bill will be known as "Bregg's Law" in honour of one of my constituents, Mr. Tom Bregg, an Edmonton transit bus driver who was the victim of a violent attack resulting in serious permanent injuries.

Mr. Bregg and members of the Amalgamated Transit Union are present today to witness the introduction of this important legislation. I thank Mr. Bregg for his courage in sharing his story, which serves as the inspiration for the Public Transit Operators Act.

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

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INFORMATION COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table pursuant to subsection 39 of the Access to Information Act a special report of the Information Commissioner entitled, "Open Outlook, Open Access—2009-2010 Report Cards".

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC) moved:

That, notwithstanding any standing or special order or usual practice of the House, C-61, An Act to provide for the taking of restrictive measures in respect of the property of officials and former officials of foreign states and of their family members, be allowed to be called for the third reading stage today; that, during the debate at the said stage, not more than one member from each recognized party may speak for not more than two minutes, after which the bill shall be deemed read a third time and passed; and that the House then immediately proceed to consideration of the opposition motion under the Business of Supply.

The Speaker: Does the hon. Chief Government Whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

BROADCASTING INDUSTRY

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to present a petition signed by over 1,000 constituents from my riding of Guelph who are calling on the Prime Minister to reaffirm the importance of Canada's national public broadcaster.

There is no denying that, like me, the signatories of the petition are strong believers in public broadcasting and strong supporters of the CBC and Radio-Canada. Their support and their affirmation of the CBC and Radio-Canada's importance is unmistakable, as stated within the first four words of the petition, "We love the CBC".

The CBC gives a voice to people, communities, regions and issues that would not otherwise be heard or serviced. In addition to requesting the reaffirmation of the importance of the CBC, the petition also calls on the Prime Minister to provide the CBC with adequate financing by raising its current funding levels, rather than reducing them as planned.

I hope that when responding to the petition, the federal government will strongly consider the cherished memories the CBC has provided Canadians throughout its existence and support the calls for increasing CBC and Radio-Canada's funding.

●(1015)

[Translation]

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by 4,203 people.

Routine Proceedings

This petition calls on the government to move forward with Bill C-452, which would authorize the Commissioner of Competition to conduct an inquiry of her own accord into the fluctuating price of gasoline. This is even more important these days, since the price at the pumps changes from one day to the next.

Members from every party hear from the public every day. These fluctuating gas prices make no sense. This petition calls on the government to authorize the Competition Bureau to conduct inquiries to determine whether consumers are paying a fair price for gasoline.

[English]

AIR CANADA

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by machinists from the Air Canada overhaul base in Winnipeg. Over 500 full-time employees may be finding their jobs ending up in El Salvador. Air Canada failed in its duty to comply with the Air Canada Public Participation Act by selling its overhaul bases to Aveos, formerly known as ACTS, in Winnipeg, Mississauga and Montreal.

On December 14, 2010, the Air Canada counsel at the transport committee claimed that Aeroman, the Aveos subsidiary in El Salvador, could not do Air Canada maintenance in El Salvador. This is totally untrue, as Aeroman performs maintenance on exactly the same aircraft as is overhauled in Winnipeg, namely the A320 series and the Embraer.

The El Salvador shops can maintain 87% of Air Canada's fleet. In a confidential J.P. Morgan information memorandum from February 2007, which attracted equity investors into the company, they detailed the expansion plan in El Salvador going from four to sixteen lines.

Just so members know, Aveos has only four lines in Vancouver, four in Montreal, one in Toronto and five in Winnipeg, for a total of fourteen. In El Salvador alone it will have 16 lines, more than all of Canada combined.

San Salvador overhauls the exact same narrow-body planes, the A320s, as Winnipeg and Montreal does. Page 28 states that the narrow-body aircraft can travel to Central America for service. The report states that aircraft overhaul schedules are months and years in advance, so it is easy to schedule the work in El Salvador.

When we consider that the machinists in Canada cost Air Canada \$90 an hour and in San Salvador only \$40 an hour, we can see where this is going.

Workers want Air Canada to comply with the Air Canada Public Participation Act by reverting to ownership of its overhaul centres.

The Speaker: I would remind hon. members that presenting petitions are to be brief summaries of the petitions, not lengthy speeches. I would urge members to restrain themselves and comply in that respect of the rules.

RIGHT TO LIFE

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition on behalf of constituents who note that Canada is a country that respects human rights and that

since 1988 there has been no law to protect the lives of unborn children.

The petitioners call on Parliament to pass legislation that will protect life from conception until natural death.

PENSIONS

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my second petition, the petitioners note that right now an individual has to contribute to Canadian society for 10 years to be eligible for old age security. They note that Bill C-428 would reduce that requirement to three years.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to defeat Bill C-428, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act.

AIR CANADA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions. The first petition deals with the Air Canada Public Participation Act.

As the member for Elmwood—Transcona has said, there is a great deal of concern with regard to thousands of jobs in Winnipeg, Mississauga and Montreal. These jobs are all at risk because Air Canada is not following the intent and what was meant in the passage of the Air Canada Public Participation Act.

The petitioners are asking the government to take the action necessary to hold Air Canada accountable for protecting those most important jobs in the aerospace industry.

• (1020)

PENSIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition deals with the guaranteed annual supplement for our seniors.

Our seniors built our country and they are very concerned in terms of affordability. They do not necessarily have the money to buy some of the essentials, whether it is medicare or being able to buy their grandchildren a McDonald's happy meal on their birthday or whatever it might be.

There is a time in which we need to come to the table for our seniors and I would suggest that the time is now. We need to increase that annual supplement, which is what the petition is ultimately asking.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

First, I have the honour to present a petition signed by thousands of Canadians across our great country. They draw the attention of the House of Commons to the fact that the Internet is unregulated and that it is a pipeline for child pornography and child exploitation.

The petitioners refer to statistics that show that 39% of those who possess child sex abuse materials have images of children between three and five years old and 83% have images of children between six and twelve years old being sexually assaulted.

Government Orders

The petitioners also aver that section 163 of the Criminal Code currently allows sentences of as little as 90 days for making criminal child sex material and 14 days for the possession of criminal sex materials.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to speedily enact legislation that would change the legal terminology in section 163 from “child pornography” to “child sex abuse materials” and enact strong and mandatory minimum sentences that would protect children, provide justice and deter pedophilia.

In the interest of time, Mr. Speaker, my second petition essentially does the same thing. It calls upon the government to enact those changes.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

MIDDLE EAST

The Speaker: The Chair has received a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt. I will hear the hon. member's submissions on this point now.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my request is that we hold an emergency debate on what is happening in the Arab world. Libya is in a civil war; madman Gadhafi is killing his own people. Egypt was just liberated from Hosni Mubarak and last night in the news we saw what is happening with religious strife. The Canadian government is sending a frigate to Libya.

Our constituents want us to engage in a debate. As we are helping to build democracies, we are watching what is happening over there and it is directly having an effect here. The price of gas and the cost of goods have been driven up.

I am asking for an emergency debate in order for all members of Parliament to participate and voice their concerns as to what is happening in the Arab world and the Middle East.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt for his interest in this matter and his persistence in seeking a debate on this matter. Certainly, there is a continuing situation that is serious in the Middle East, as mentioned in his letter and as he has asserted today in his arguments, but I am not satisfied that the situation has changed enough or warrants, at this point, an emergency debate. Accordingly, I am going to refuse his request today.

I note that we will not be sitting next week. Obviously, if the situation changes over that time, there may be a different situation when we resume. For the time being, I do not think the situation has

changed enough to warrant an emergency debate within the provisions of the Standing Orders and I will refuse this request.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1025)

[English]

FREEZING ASSETS OF CORRUPT FOREIGN OFFICIALS ACT

Hon. James Moore (for the Minister of Foreign Affairs) moved that Bill C-61, An Act to provide for the taking of restrictive measures in respect of the property of officials and former officials of foreign states and of their family members, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the short title of this bill is now “Freezing Assets of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act”. I want to take this opportunity to thank all of my colleagues, most importantly those in the foreign affairs committee, who have worked diligently to ensure this bill has a quick passage in the House and becomes law in the shortest possible time.

Collectively, members in the House have sent a message that a dictator and his family, including officials associated with the regime, will not find a safe haven in Canada for stealing money or assets from their citizens. This bill has all the safeguards required to ensure compliance with all Canadian laws.

I take this opportunity to thank specifically Bloc members who have allowed the quick passage of this bill.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I simply want to indicate the support of the Liberal Party for this measure, with the proviso that the legislation, together with its companion legislation, SEMA, the Special Economic Measures Act, will be reviewed by the House and the Senate over the next five years.

It seems to me that we are living in times when measures such as this one need to be available to the government. The powers that are given to the government need to be exercised carefully and in strict accordance with the wording of the act. However, we are satisfied that the international situation and the fluidity of the movement of capital are such that it is important for us to take certain measures.

[Translation]

We know that there are changes going on in the world. At the same time, we are seeing greater fluidity in the movement of capital throughout the world. There is also the fact that, in corrupt regimes, some people have used their political power to take money. Therefore, we must give our governments the ability to respond. The Liberal Party will support this measure.

Business of Supply

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we were very pleased to delay our opposition day in order to fast-track Bill C-61. As you know, the Bloc Québécois has been asking for weeks, during question period and in committee, that the government freeze the assets of Ben Ali and his family, who live in Quebec, notably in the Montreal area. Just recently, Ben Ali's brother-in-law was conducting transactions without repercussion.

We believe that the government has for several weeks now had the means to freeze these assets under the Criminal Code of Canada and the UN Convention against Corruption, but passing Bill C-61 means that the government will have to act and freeze the assets of this dictator and his family as well as any others who find themselves in a similar situation in the future.

Let us hope that the Senate moves quickly on Bill C-61. I am anxious to speak to the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher in a few days and see what has been done. The Bloc Québécois is pleased to be supporting Bill C-61.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I join with my colleagues in supporting the fast-tracking of this bill. I also want to mention the importance of having this review. From the beginning, it was our party's position that this needed a review. We are talking about significant changes, albeit ones that are needed. When we are moving rapidly to make changes like these, it is important that Parliament have an opportunity for review.

I also want to recognize the public servants who worked on this matter. Often they are not given the accolades they deserve. When these things happen, we all know who does the detailed work. I want to thank the officials at the Department of Justice and the Department of Foreign Affairs, those who were willing and able to brief us and appear at committee.

There is no doubt this is a phenomenon we will have to deal with in a different way in terms of legislative tools. This is important. We also have to acknowledge that assets exist here from questionable regimes. In particular, we are seeing a kind of strong-arm phenomenon, in that individuals who are using the profits from ill-gotten gains are often supported by companies from the west. These have to be scrutinized more closely. FINTRAC is one means, but we need something that is a lot more precise.

I would note that the government did bring in measures on arms restrictions banning exports to Libya. It is important to note that to date, the government has not brought forward to Parliament, and therefore Canadians, a report on our arms exports as a country. That has to happen.

I would also mention that this bill has to go through the Senate quickly. I would hope that would be done with Bill C-393 as well.

• (1030)

The Speaker: Order. Pursuant to an order made earlier today, Bill C-61, An Act to provide for the taking of restrictive measures in respect of the property of officials and former officials of foreign states and of their family members, is deemed read a third time and passed.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CONDUCT OF GOVERNMENT

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ) moved:

That this House denounce the conduct of the government, its disregard for democracy and its determination to go to any lengths to advance its partisan interests and impose its regressive ideology, as it did by justifying the Conservative Party's circumvention of the rules on election spending in the 2005-2006 election campaign, when the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism used public funds to solicit donations to the Conservative Party, when the Party used taxpayers' money to finance a pre-election campaign under the guise of promoting Canada's Economic Action Plan, when it changed the wording in government communications to promote itself, when it showed that it is acceptable for a minister to alter a document and make misleading statements to the House, when it refused to provide a parliamentary committee with the costs of its proposals, and when it improperly prorogued Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Québec.

It would be impossible to go over all of the abuses listed in this motion in just 10 minutes. I will not bother rereading the motion, since you just did such a good job.

First of all, I would simply like to remind the House that we think it is very clear that the Conservative government's ideology is harmful to democracy. We see this every day.

Second, it is also very clear that the Conservative Party does not like to abide by democratic rules and that it sees Parliament as an obstacle to be circumvented. In fact, we saw this twice when the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament and once when an election was called, all just so the Conservatives could not be held accountable to the opposition, to parliamentarians.

Third, the government likes to take an autocratic approach. We have seen several examples of its utter disrespect for parliamentarians and democratic institutions. Such examples include its recent refusal to hand over documents needed by the Standing Committee on Finance to carry out its work, its refusal to hand over uncensored documents concerning allegations of torture in Afghanistan, until the Speaker issued a ruling on this in April 2010, and its refusal to allow ministerial staff to testify before committees. These all show a clear lack of respect for parliamentarians and democracy.

Again yesterday, Mr. Speaker, you issued two rulings concerning events listed in the motion. I hope I have time to come back to them later. If I do not have time to revisit them, I am sure my hon. colleague from Québec will have the opportunity to discuss them further.

And fourth, that entire regressive ideology can be seen not only in this contempt for democracy, but also in the government's desire to advance a hidden agenda. We can sometimes see aspects of that hidden agenda peeking over the horizon, for example when backbench MPs are used to try to reopen the debate about pregnancy choice and when they use backbench MPs to promote the government's desire to dismantle the firearms registry.

Business of Supply

Instead of holding open debates, they prefer to bring changes in through the back door. Here is another example: bills dealing with changes to the Senate, changes that are totally unconstitutional, as virtually all our experts have told us. Because the Conservative government is not able to do what it wants to do directly, it does it indirectly, constantly using half-truths and approximations and never hesitating to misrepresent the facts. Unfortunately, we often see examples of this during question period and statements by members.

What is pretty unbelievable is that during the 2005-2006 election campaign the Conservatives and the Prime Minister portrayed themselves as the ones who wanted to distance themselves from the obfuscation and lack of transparency of the Liberals. They wanted to make themselves the champions of transparency, integrity and accountability.

After the sponsorship scandal, the Conservatives wanted to show that they were an honest alternative to a party that had agreed, for no reason other than to try to buy off Quebecers after the 1995 referendum, to divert public funds not only for partisan purposes, but also to enhance the federal government's visibility, in addition to greasing the palms of a number of advertising agencies.

The Conservatives portrayed themselves as the ones who were going to wash whiter than white. The fact is that the Conservative washing machine has been broken for several years, since 2006. Not only is the machine broken and no longer getting things so white, the opposite is in fact true; the works have come apart and there is oil on the clothes. The longer it goes on, the dirtier the clothes in the Conservative washing machine look, and the dirtier they will keep getting. It all started with the 2005-2006 election, when a scheme was put in place to exceed the national limits on advertising spending by using the space left over by 67 candidates who all, to my knowledge, come from Quebec.

● (1035)

So we have transfers made from Conservative Party headquarters to ridings, which in turn paid bills, because of decisions made at the national level. There are no problems transferring funds from the national level to the ridings, or vice versa. We do it all the time. But the law says that those transfers must be made in accordance with the Elections Canada rules. That was not the case in this 2005-2006 situation. So we hope the Conservative Party will pay back the \$200,000 it got itself, fraudulently, from Canadian taxpayers, and that it will also drop its legal actions. This is not an administrative dispute, as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons say. We are talking about fraud here, I would remind you. The director of public prosecutions has called it fraud and producing fake invoices, and on that point, former Conservative candidates have testified to illegal acts committed to obtain illegal refunds, as I said just now.

There was another misleading statement made, in particular, by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. He said that if the Chief Electoral Officer was aware of the Conservatives' scheme, it was because the Conservative Party gave him the information. What does he take us for? We all remember watching the news and seeing the RCMP raid on the Conservative Party's headquarters—clearly at

Elections Canada's request—to retrieve the papers and emails necessary to expand upon existing evidence.

The Conservative Party never co-operated with Elections Canada. It did everything it could to try to delay the final decision, particularly through court action. The Conservative Party's failure to co-operate is the most obvious evidence of its guilt. Sooner or later, the Conservatives must be accountable for their actions.

I would like to read several excerpts from the Federal Court of Appeal's recent ruling, which dismissed one of the Conservative Party's cases against Elections Canada. Paragraph 93 reads as follows:

A key concern of the CEOC was the failure of the candidates to submit documentary evidence of the existence or terms of a contract with RMI [Retail Media Inc.] under which the advertisements were purchased by the candidates directly, or by the Party as the agent of the participating candidates. Indeed, the Party conceded that no contractual document between RMI and the candidates or the Party existed.

Hence, the scheme had absolutely no legal basis. I will read two other paragraphs. Unfortunately, I realize that I am going to run out of time. Paragraph 102 states:

The CEOC could reasonably regard the bases on which the costs of the RMB [regional media buys] were allocated as indicative more of a cost-shifting arrangement than an agreement by the participating candidates to purchase advertisements from RMI, either directly or through the Party.

The last two lines of paragraph 103 state:

...when the Party asked candidates to participate in the RMB, it was close to its permitted spending limit, a consideration that would make attractive a scheme to shift to candidates the cost of additional advertising with national themes.

Clearly, this is very serious. It is just as serious as the use of House resources by the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to solicit funds in order to target certain ethnocultural communities. I hope that a number of my colleagues will have the opportunity to come back to this over the course of the day.

It is just as serious as the misleading statements by the Minister of International Cooperation, who flip-flopped. On April 23, 2010, in response to a question on the order paper, the minister said that the decision not to fund KAIROS was made by CIDA. On December 9, 2010, in committee, she said the opposite, that it was her decision.

I will conclude with this last point. On December 9, 2010, in committee, she said she did not know who added the word "not" to the document on funding for KAIROS. On February 14, 2011, in this House, she said that the word "not" was added at her direction.

That is the true face of the Conservative Party. The Conservatives have spun a web of deceit just to stay in power. That is unacceptable.

● (1040)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his speech. I have a question for him. Day after day, we see and hear government MPs accusing opposition MPs of using the same in and out scheme, but not a single MP from any of the three opposition parties has been charged with doing what the government MPs did.

Business of Supply

Could the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois explain to me why only government MPs were charged by Elections Canada?

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member from the New Democratic Party for his question.

I think he raised an indisputable fact. The only party whose expenses were rejected by Elections Canada is the Conservative Party. The only party whose headquarters were raided by the RCMP was, again, the Conservative Party. All the other parties are well aware of the rules and followed them to the letter. Again, these are misleading statements, especially by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, who has been coming up with information on the NDP, the Bloc and the Liberals that has nothing to do with the matter.

They are trying to evade the issue. They committed fraud. Let them return the money and stop going after Elections Canada unnecessarily.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to know whether the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois believes that the two ministers recently involved in controversy, the Minister of Immigration and the Minister of International Cooperation who wrote the word “no” on the KAIROS file, should do the honourable thing and step down.

• (1045)

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with the member. The facts are there. Besides, the ruling the Speaker gave yesterday regarding the Minister of International Cooperation is very clear. This whole affair is enormously vague and opaque. I just read the contradictory statements that she made to the committee and to the House. When people engage in this kind of trickery, there is no choice. The British parliamentary system is based on trust, which is no longer there. She does not have the House's trust and so she should resign. The same is true for the Minister of Immigration, and I would even say that, in his case, it is even worse. As Minister of Immigration, he should take care to be above this partisan battle when it comes to all the cultural communities. But we know that the money he raised using the House's resources was to be used for an advertising campaign that targeted certain ethnocultural communities and disregarded others. What message does this send? It was not the Conservative Party, it was the Minister of Immigration who, as a Conservative organizer, decided to focus on four ethnocultural communities because he thinks they are perhaps more open to the Conservative ideology and ideas. The others, he is going to toss aside.

Does this mean that, as Minister of Immigration, he is going to focus on the four communities that the Conservative Party has identified and toss aside the others? Why create two classes of newcomers to Canada? It is completely unworthy of a Minister of Immigration. He should resign for that reason as well.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am going to address my House leader. The Minister of International Cooperation changed her story a few times, but what really concerns us is the fact that she denied funding to KAIROS against the advice of her officials. So what did she have against KAIROS? What is this organization?

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, it seems that life produces some fairly interesting anecdotes and linkages. The minister initially told us that government employees had advised her to cut the funding for KAIROS. We now know that this is untrue, but we also know why the funding for KAIROS was cut. It was the Minister of Immigration himself who said it in Jerusalem: funding was cut because of the position taken by KAIROS, an organization that unites many churches. The Prime Minister was of the opinion that KAIROS was too close to the concerns of Palestinians and not close enough to the sometimes very questionable decisions of the Israeli government.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on this opposition day as my party's democratic reform critic. This motion was made necessary because of the actions the Conservatives have taken since they came into power in 2006.

My colleague from Joliette spoke a lot about the saga involving the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and also the actions of the Conservative Party, in particular the government, with respect to financing for that party, which established a scheme to obtain more money to pay for their advertising. I will come back to this later.

I would like to go over a few examples, because these are not just recent examples. Since they were elected in 2006, the Conservatives have interfered with democracy by manipulating principles as they see fit or even completely disregarding them. This is very worrisome because it creates precedents and we can dare not imagine what would happen with a majority government.

I would like to quote columnist Manon Cornellier, who wrote in the newspaper *Le Devoir* on September 29, 2010:

[Citizens] are kept in the dark and deprived of fundamental information, which means they are no longer as capable of exercising their primary democratic right of judging the government.

Democracy is always exercised better and more intelligently in a context of transparency, rigour and credible information.

I quoted this columnist because I want to remind the government why it is not currently a majority government and why there is an opposition. The opposition is here to shed light on government decisions and to hold the government accountable to the public.

For example, when I go back to the Quebec City area, many people who voted for me or my colleague in Louis-Hébert say they elected us because they do not want this to be a majority government and do not want its ideology imposed on Quebeckers. That is why the Bloc Québécois is so strong all over Quebec. The government is especially abusive in how it treats democracy here in the House. Today we are debating the reasons why the Conservatives are criticized so much, so often provoke stormy debates, and make a mockery of the opposition's right to express its views and hold the government to account.

Business of Supply

The Conservatives do not want to be accountable to anyone and do not hesitate to resorts to all kinds of tricks, even going so far as to break the most elementary rules by which they should abide in respectable country that is supposed to be democratic. They do not care a fig about democracy and shrink from nothing when it comes to promoting their partisan interests and imposing their reactionary ideology. There are many recent examples, and our motion mentions some of them.

I would like to refresh the memories of certain colleagues, and also of the people watching us, by reviewing a few more examples that are not mentioned in the motion put forward by my colleague from Joliette. For several years now, the Shannon citizens' coalition and its lawyers have tried repeatedly to obtain documents from the Department of National Defence on the contamination of ground water. However, the government has been delaying the release of documents sought under the Access to Information Act, has been obstructive, and has simply failed to disclose the documents in question.

Last November 25, we managed—because opposition members are in the majority here in the House—to adopt an order to produce the documents. The documents deal with reports analyzing the water supply system at the Valcartier base since 1970. I asked the minister a question because he had promised to table the documents. He said right here in the House, before all the members, that he would table them. So what did he do? Nothing. The government and the Department of National Defence are still hiding behind the class action suit that is now before the courts. But when I asked him, he said it was already headed for the courts. Did he show good faith? No, he misled the House and all citizens about his real intentions.

A similar situation arose regarding the disclosure of documents about the transfer of prisoners in Afghanistan. The government was refusing to release the documents and that is why it prorogued Parliament in December 2009. You had given a ruling, Mr. Speaker, in April 2010 that ordered the government to release the documents, which were not a threat to national security. So what happened?

• (1050)

One year later, a committee has examined the issue but no documents have been made public. If that is not obstruction, I wonder what it is. The government is delaying telling the truth to citizens. It is also delaying bills. It deemed it appropriate to have a majority of senators in the other place to block bills passed by the House. The Senate absolutely refuses to look at all the bills and come to a decision.

The Conservatives seem to have a hard time understanding and applying the basic principles of democracy. One of these principles calls for a separation of powers between the public and political administrations. Yet, how many times have the Conservatives interfered in the public administration since they took office? How many times have they muzzled senior public servants who did not share their views, or did not want to implement a partisan decision? KAIROS, to which the hon. member for Trois-Rivières referred earlier, is one example. The list of victims is a long one, but I will mention a few.

Linda Keen, former head of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, was fired during the scandal related to the downtime

of the Chalk River reactors. Munir Sheikh, the Chief Statistician of Statistics Canada, resigned because he did not support abolishing the mandatory long form census. Rémy Beaugard, whose management of Rights and Democracy was criticized, died of a heart attack after a stormy and tumultuous meeting. Marty Cheliak, former head of the Canadian firearms program, was let go because he was about to table a report supporting gun control. There is also Patrick Stogran, the former Veterans Ombudsman, whose mandate was not renewed because he dared criticize the government's treatment of veterans.

All these individuals were fired or their mandate was not renewed because the government was not pleased. The Senate has blocked legislation such as Bill C-311, which was supported by the Bloc Québécois and a majority of elected members in this House. This bill, dealing with our responsibility regarding global climate change, was contrary to the government's vision on the environment. They rejected it without even looking at it. The Conservatives set a precedent that had not been seen since 1930. They show a blatant disrespect for democratic institutions.

I could list numerous other bills that have been blocked, including the one requiring that Supreme Court judges be bilingual. The Conservatives bought time by constantly stalling the study of the bill until they had a majority in the Senate. The Prime Minister promised to change the rules of the game so that government would be more transparent. But what he has done is worse than what the Liberals did and, in some ways, he has gone even further than they did. The Conservatives' actions of late, coupled with the fact that Conservative senators are getting away with spending money from the Senate budget to promote their partisan ideology, lead us to believe that there is some confusion between the resources of a political party and the resources of the government or the House of Commons.

Taxpayers' money was used for partisan purposes and electioneering. They are always telling the House that public money needs to be respected and that the government is careful about how it spends public money. But what did they do? They used a scam to pay for ads and took \$200,000 from taxpayers. They exceeded their election campaign spending limit.

Today we are going to “highlight” everything they have done since they came to power. We will demonstrate that this government is not transparent and that the Prime Minister has not kept his election promises. People wanted to see the Conservatives in power so that there would be more transparency. But that is not what we are seeing these days.

• (1055)

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Québec on her excellent presentation on democracy and lack of transparency in the House.

Business of Supply

I would like her opinion on the funding of KAIROS. We have seen the Minister of International Cooperation change her mind and not answer questions here in the House, often with the protection of her House Leader. In my colleague's view, what prevented the Minister of International Cooperation from saying from the start that she was rejecting the public servants' recommendation and from explaining why?

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Indeed, the minister said one thing one day and the opposite the next. She wrote in a "not", thereby withholding her approval of this recommendation. As was pointed out earlier, the minister obeyed her leader. This came from the top of the pyramid. The Prime Minister disagreed with the position of the agency in question, KAIROS, because it had certain policies which are contrary to the policy on Israel and it was more sensitive to the Palestinian issue, and that displeased the Prime Minister. That is why she was evasive about this. One day she said it was the bureaucrats, and another day she said it was her own doing. That is why this file was a mess.

• (1100)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois for her opinion on the fraudulent plan of the Conservatives. We know that they used the in and out system, similar to the way that criminals launder money. I am not saying they are criminals. They have not been found guilty yet. Criminals and the mob launder money using an in and out system. Canadian taxpayers are now obliged to pay for what the Conservatives did. Taxpayers' money was brought back into the constituencies that used the in and out system.

Does our colleague believe that the Conservatives who used in and out schemes in their constituencies should return the money to the taxpayers?

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr., Speaker, it is true that this money should not have been spent by the national party because it had reached its spending limit. So this money transited through certain constituencies for operations which in many cases did not take place, and the Conservatives transferred invoicing responsibility to those constituencies. It was a real in and out scheme. I wonder, for example, why Elections Canada saw fit to carry out a search and prosecute the Conservative government. I find it revolting that the government would have us believe that members from other parties used in and out practices: that is totally false.

For example, did Elections Canada accept the expenses of other members from the other parties? They are the ones that were prosecuted, not the other members. The Conservatives were trying to create a distraction, but Elections Canada did not find in their favour. The Conservative Party should take a look at how it operated in its own constituencies during this campaign. For my part, I clearly remember the money that came into the ridings to be spent improperly there.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say first that I will be sharing my time with the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca.

While the Bloc and its coalition partners are hatching schemes to trigger a pointless and expensive election, we continue to focus on the priority for Canadians, by which I mean the economy and job creation. Our government is taking measures to lay the economic and financial foundation for a strong economy and a robust job market.

In spite of the Bloc's systematic opposition, we have been active throughout the recent global recession to ensure that Canada continues to have a stable economic base that will enable it to grow and prosper.

All of our investments have the same basic principle: the success of our country as a whole is essentially dependent on good economic management, which leads to success for individuals and families.

Canada's economic action plan, which was implemented in 2009, provided for necessary, targeted one-time investments to meet the immediate and temporary needs created by the recession, and for permanent investments that will provide a foundation for the initiatives in place and improve those initiatives.

The effect of those investments has been that the Canadian economy came out of the recession stronger than a majority of the other G7 and G20 countries. I would point out that the Bloc systematically opposed all those measures. The Conservative government has demonstrated its flexibility in meeting the needs of the public. Canada came through the global recession in better shape than all of the other industrialized countries.

Labour market participation is key to the economic recovery and to Canada's recovery. It benefits Canadians and their families, and contributes to Canada's economic advantage both today and in the future.

A broad range of federal measures and initiatives has been put in place to encourage labour market participation among various groups of Canadians, and to ensure that they are able to meet their needs and their families' needs.

We are investing as never before in skills training and development to enable Canadians to acquire and update the skills they will need throughout their lives, and to fill the jobs that are available now.

In 2008-2009, nearly 900,000 Canadians benefited from the programs and services subsidized under the labour market development agreements and labour market agreements signed with the provinces and territories.

The aim of those agreements is to support training for unemployed persons who are eligible for employment insurance and develop the skills of unemployed persons who are not eligible for employment insurance, workers who have been abandoned by the Bloc.

Under the economic action plan, the funding for labour market development agreements was temporarily increased by 500...

• (1105)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member for Québec on a point of order.

Business of Supply

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, as I read the motion, I think the hon. member from the Conservative government has the wrong debate. He is not responding at all to the motion before us today. He is completely off base.

I want to call the hon. member to order with regard to the content of his speech. I ask that the hon. member stick to the motion being debated today or explain how his comments relate to the motion.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would remind all hon. members that whenever we are engaged in debate that we discuss the matter before the House. The opposition day motion today is broad. It touches on several issues. I encourage all hon. members to speak to that. I anticipate that while it may take detours getting there, all hon. members will speak relevantly to the motion.

The hon. Minister of State.

Hon. Denis Lebel: That is exactly what we are doing, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

The Conservative government is also investing money to make careers in trades more attractive and encourage more apprentices to complete their training.

We are providing assistance of up to \$4,000 to apprentices under the apprenticeship incentive grant and the apprenticeship completion grant.

In 2010-11, our government allocated more than \$38 million to the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, a national centre of expertise that offers information and resources for improving adult literacy and essential skills. We are doing what we said we would do. We are respecting the workings of Parliament.

Our government believes that the strength of the economy and the labour market depends on a skilled and educated workforce and that is why we are investing in post-secondary education. In 2010, more than 400,000 post-secondary students across Canada received loans and bursaries from the government. In 2009, we implemented a new Canada student grants program. In 2009, the government also implemented a new measure to help students who are having difficulty paying back their loans.

We know that many things can happen in the lives of Canadians, and the recent economic slowdown has created additional problems for the unemployed.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Clearly, the member has no intention of directing his comments to the motion at hand.

Perhaps I have to read it for him:

That this House condemn the government's use of all the tactics and tools at its disposal to exercise unwarranted control over institutions that must remain independent of the government in order to aggressively push its conservative ideology, namely Parliament, by abusing the power to prorogue and belittling parliamentary committees—

That is what he is supposed to be directing his comments to. So far, he has not said one word that addresses this motion today.

An hon. member: That is the wrong motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I appreciate the point raised by the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona. He spoke to the intention of the hon. member. I would suggest that we do not know the intention of the hon. minister.

However, I would encourage members to speak to the motion before the House. I note that the motion is broad and has many components. I believe all hon. members know that it is the practice of the Chair to give the members speaking every opportunity to bring their speeches back to relevance and to the point of the business before the House.

The hon. minister of state.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, we are not the ones who made it up, but the motion refers to Canada's economic action plan, so we are talking about Canada's economic action plan. We are often criticized for not using money wisely. We are showing this morning that Canadians' money is being invested for the good of Canadian society, to help people find jobs and to meet the government's commitments.

It can be difficult for members of certain groups, such as aboriginals, newcomers, persons with a disability, young people and older workers, to have access to labour market opportunities. We are therefore providing targeted support to a number of these groups, particularly for training and skills development.

As part of Canada's economic action plan, the federal government is investing \$75 million over two years in the aboriginal skills and training strategic investment fund, in addition to extending the aboriginal skills and employment partnership program by—

● (1110)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. Is the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona rising on the same point of order or another point of order?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, the member said that the motion talked about the economic action plan. If he read the motion, he would see that there is absolutely not one word on that. The economic action plan is not even mentioned in this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I thank the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Once again I would remind all hon. members to familiarize themselves with the business before the House and to make their comments relate to that. The Chair grants great latitude in terms of what can be related back to the business of the House. However, members' comments ought to relate to the matter before the House.

The hon. minister of state.

Business of Supply

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, as we have already said, we continue to use Canadian taxpayers' dollars wisely. For instance, we are investing \$30 million in the opportunities fund for persons with disabilities, and that is just one example.

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister has proven in recent days, all parties in the House of Commons have used the same tactics that we are being criticized for using. It was Conservative Party money, raised by Conservatives for Conservative advertising. As we know, rulings were handed down recently, which we plan to appeal. We have proven that all parties have used money to support local candidates.

Our government has always been very respectful of all government operations and we will continue respecting them. Proof of this lies in the significant economic success we have achieved: five consecutive quarters of growth in our markets, in the GDP and in Canada's economy. What Canadians want most is for our economy to continue to grow, despite some setbacks we have seen south of the border. We hope the U.S. economy improves. That is very important for us.

While the opposition is trying anything it can to trigger an unwanted election, on this side of the House, we are taking care of the economy, which is the top priority of Canadians.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister has just demonstrated that, after fostering a culture of secrecy by providing as little information as possible, this government developed a new strategy: dodging the issue. We have seen that the Conservative government does not really stick to this motion, but wanders off topic.

I would like to speak to him about the government's attitude, which is truly autocratic and undemocratic. Government employees were issued a directive at the end of last year to replace "Government of Canada" on all correspondence with the Prime Minister's name followed by the word "Government". Speaking of autocracy, this makes me think of Louis XIV, who said, "L'État, c'est moi." or "I am the State".

What is going on? Have the Conservatives become so authoritarian, undemocratic and disconnected that they are not only giving speeches in the House that are not even related to the motion, but also withholding information and resorting to all sorts of wrongdoings? I would like to remind them that they are the ones who were charged by Elections Canada.

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, I have before me the motion, which states:

...under the guise of promoting Canada's Economic Action Plan...

The motion therefore refers to Canada's economic action plan. It is clearly written in the motion. We are being told that we have demonstrated various behaviours, and I truly hope that the hon. members who will come after me will be able to continue to demonstrate the quality of our government.

I would like to respond by saying that our government and the government representatives from Quebec who are currently in office have also seen what the party opposite has done over the past

20 years. Earlier, I heard the member for Québec speak. In 20 years, under different governments, her party has succeeded in having only four bills pass and receive royal assent, three to change the names of ridings and one to create a commemorative holiday.

The government's representatives are the ones that get results that affect people's salaries and their day-to-day lives and they will gladly continue to do so.

• (1115)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course prorogation has happened 105 times in the last 143 years. In fact, most sessions only last a year, and that is pretty much on par with what happened the last time. Thus Bloc members are trying to change the channel and we know that. We need to get back to what they are trying to change the channel from.

I do not know if many people in Quebec realize that the Bloc voted against Canada's economic action plan, the plan that is taking us out of the global recession. In fact, Bloc members voted against every improvement to roads in Quebec, against every job initiative that we have had in Quebec, and against repairs to bridges and all of the wonderful work that is going on in Quebec right now.

I would ask the member, is that why the Bloc is putting forward motions like this and playing mischief in Parliament? It makes sense to me, but I want him to be clear on that as well.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question. It is obvious that the party opposite only wants to prove that Canada does not work well. This is the only thing members opposite have in mind. They are only here, in Ottawa, in order to isolate Quebec. We, Quebeckers, who represent Quebec within the government and make decisions, will never let them do what they want to do. Not only have they voted against each and every item of Canada's economic action plan, but they also credited themselves for the results of the economic action plan. When our government postponed the ending date of infrastructure projects from March 31 to October 31, they went to all the broadcasters and newspapers in the province of Quebec to give themselves credit for the results of a plan they voted against. After 20 years of misinformation, it is time to speak the truth to the people of Quebec.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to the motion presented by the hon. member for Joliette. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you and the staff especially for this opportunity because there were many Conservatives who wanted to speak to this motion because we see the mischief in the Bloc. We see that the Bloc members are trying to change the channel from their position of not supporting Quebeckers in Canada's economic action plan, not standing up for Quebeckers when they had the opportunity to do so.

Business of Supply

I know the Bloc members are ashamed of that and they would like to go back and change the channel, but we are not going to let them. We are going to ensure that all Quebeckers realize that Bloc members, when they had the opportunity to do so, did not stand up to invest in Quebec. It was the Conservative members from Quebec who stood up for Quebeckers and I am proud to be part of a caucus that has those members in it.

It is a very clear and shameful attempt by Bloc members to play partisan games that actually do not benefit people, that do not benefit Canadians, and to avoid discussing the real issues.

The members are laughing and cackling while we have a global economic crisis. They are laughing and they are bringing forward mischief motions and not substantive motions.

We need to concentrate on the jobs of Quebeckers and Canadians. We need to concentrate on the economy of Canada. That is what we have been doing and it has been very successful.

Look at the other nations in the G20. We lead the way in the world today with our economy and we are proud of that. However, we have done that without the help of the Bloc, and we continue to do that without the help of the Bloc. It is important for Quebeckers and all Canadians to know that.

I am sure if we were to ask Canadians in every region of this country, in particular Quebec, which the Bloc members say they represent but we know they do not represent, it is the important issues such as the economy and protecting jobs that are important to Canadians and Quebeckers. Bloc members should be ashamed of themselves for their position in the past and, seemingly, their position today. While we are trying to concentrate on creating jobs, protecting jobs, they are concentrating on silly, political games that do not do anything for Canadians, that do not create jobs, that do not protect our economy.

However, this should not be a surprise to anyone. Just as we saw earlier this week with a similar motion from the Liberal Party, the opposition clearly is more concerned with motions that are outrageous in scope and in nature. This one is no different.

We heard the NDP members stand earlier and try to throw the minister off, which of course was unsuccessful. They also opposed Canada's economic action plan and I know they are trying to change the channel too. They are not going to get away with it. Canadians are not going to be fooled and this Conservative government is not going to let it go unnoticed. Now—

• (1120)

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the previous spokesman for the Conservative Party did not speak to the motion whatsoever. The member now is not speaking to the motion whatsoever. What do the Conservatives have to hide?

We have a very specific opposition day motion today. We are supposed to speak to it. What do government members have to hide? Why do they not want to speak to the motion? Why are they trying to change the channel? Let us speak to the motion.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, this accusation is very spurious at the most. I have been listening to the speeches. I have read the motion. They are on topic, talking about Canada's economic

action plan and all of the other things that are in the motion. The members on this side of the House are speaking to that. If opposition members would just listen, they would realize that these are relevant.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the motion does, in fact, refer to “promoting Canada’s Economic Action Plan”. What we want the hon. member to tell us is why there were 80 events, costing taxpayers \$250 million, to promote their economic action plan. During the last adjournment of the House, Conservatives toured all ridings.

Today, we are talking about the conduct of a government that thinks that the end justifies the means. When the Conservatives were in opposition, they denounced this kind of behaviour from the Liberal government. Now that they are ruling this country, they do exactly the same thing as the Liberals did. Remember the promises the Prime Minister made during the campaign. He was going to act differently, things were going to be different in Parliament and the government was going to work differently. This is what we are talking about today. So can someone explain to me why it was so urgent to hold 80 events at a cost of \$250 million in a pre-election campaign? We know there is a 50% chance that elections will be called.

[*English*]

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I have the motion in front of me and I have been listening to government members. The reality is the opposition party that presented this motion does not like to hear what the government has done on these issues because it is a good news story for the government. Members can debate that, but the rude interruptions by the Bloc and NDP members are not appropriate in the House. They should listen. If they want to debate, they should, but let us get on with it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I have listened to the points of order raised surrounding relevance. It is the Chair's observation that there are several elements in today's motion before the House that touch on several topics. Some members are speaking to elements that are included in the motion. It would appear that some are speaking to elements they feel ought to be included in the motion, or ways that different elements of the motion could or should be interpreted.

I go back to a point I raised earlier, which is that it is the practice of the Chair to grant latitude to members in speaking their minds and respect the fact that they are to make their comments relevant to the matter before the House. It is not the practice of the Chair to micromanage every minute in terms of that issue. I trust that all hon. members will respect this practice in the House of Commons and make their comments relevant to the matter before us.

Business of Supply

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intervention by government members who obviously see the bad attempts by the NDP and the Bloc to try to divert attention away from the wonderful things we have done for the Quebec and Canadian economies, for all the jobs we have created and will continue to create without their help. It is the Conservative members on this side of the House from Quebec who stand up for Quebeckers.

I am glad the Speaker sees clearly that members are trying to change the channel, but it is not going to work. Canadians need to know that when the Bloc Québécois and NDP had a chance to stand up to support Quebec's economy, they did not do so.

The people of Quebec know that and we need to make sure all Canadians know that when it comes time for them to stand up for the people of Quebec, the opposition members do not do so. I know Bloc members are ashamed of themselves because with this motion and others they are trying to change the channel. They are trying to make Quebeckers believe that they stand up for them when we know that they cannot do anything.

As was said by the minister earlier, they have done nothing since they have been here, except collect a big paycheque and provide no response, products or goods for the people of Quebec. It is this government that has carried out initiatives for roads and bridges. We have done a lot for the people of Quebec and we are not going to sit back and allow Bloc members to change the channel on the great accomplishments we have made.

We gave Quebec a seat at UNESCO. Did the Bloc do that? No, it did not. It was this Conservative government that did that. We recognized Quebec as a nation. Was it the Bloc and NDP that voted for that? No, it was the Conservatives who voted for and instituted that.

We have delivered on infrastructure priorities across Quebec and Bloc members have done nothing on that. They try to take the credit, but the reality is they cannot take it because Quebeckers are too smart. They know that it is the Conservative Prime Minister and government that stood up for the people of Quebec.

As I stated before the intervention by the NDP and the Bloc, our government will remain committed, no matter which position opposition members take, to Canada's full economic recovery. Nowhere is this more evident than through the unprecedented investments we have made through the economic action plan all across this country.

A year later, we can see the difference the plan is making for Canadians in every corner of the country through infrastructure investments that those members voted against, through income tax relief measures those members voted against and through funding for affordable housing. Can anyone believe that NDP members who stand and talk about affordable housing voted against it, just like the Bloc did? They should be ashamed of themselves. That is just a few examples of why they should be ashamed and why they are trying to change the channel today, just like the Liberals tried to do last week.

The economic action plan is providing extraordinary economic stimulus and we know that. We see the results. We can measure the results with other countries. It has been doing well at creating jobs in cities, towns and rural areas across Canada and, yes, in Quebec in

particular, no thanks to the Bloc. Why did the Bloc vote against it? Why did it not stand up for Quebeckers when it had the chance?

We have committed over \$10.75 billion across this country on over 6,300 infrastructure projects. We are keeping the economy rolling. We are keeping things going and on track and we are doing it without any thanks from the Bloc Québécois or the NDP, who are trying to change the channel.

As everyone will see in a few minutes, they will continuously try to change the channel because they are ashamed of their position on Canada's economic action plan.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the Conservative Party speech and noted that, again today, the government is still not willing to respect democratic rules. It considers this Parliament as somewhat of an obstacle that it must get around.

It uses euphemisms to avoid stating the truth. It referred to Canada's economic action plan and inferred that it was the core of the motion. We are not talking about Canada's economic action plan. We are talking about the \$250 million used for a pre-election campaign during a parliamentary constituency week.

I would like the hon. member to explain in more detail his position on the use of public money for a pre-election campaign, which is what they did, and to talk more about the motion presented by the Bloc Québécois concerning this government's many scandals.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, again members are obviously trying to change the channel from the reality. They voted against the road improvements that we invested in Quebec. They voted against 900 projects and \$30 million. They do not deliver the goods for Quebeckers.

They voted against all the bridge repairs that this government has been involved with in our partnership with the Quebec government and with municipalities right across Quebec. They voted against those initiatives. They voted against those partnerships because all they know how to do is divide and vote against legislation. They do not know how to pass bills.

They voted against freshwater investments and waste water investments. Why would they do that? Why would members of the NDP one day stand up and talk about all the wonderful things we could do with the environment and then when they have the chance they vote against it?

They voted against all our green infrastructure investments, the \$1 billion on the green infrastructure fund. Both parties voted against that. They should be ashamed of themselves. They should quit trying to change the channel and deal with jobs and the economy.

Business of Supply

•(1130)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I note that the hon. member is not answering the questions. I will continue to ask him questions pertaining to this motion because that is today's subject.

Yesterday, for the third time in one year, the Speaker ruled that this government had breached parliamentary privilege. I would like our Conservative colleague to tell us how he will avoid explaining to our audience at home yesterday's ruling by the Speaker to the effect that his party lacks transparency and does not respect democratic rules.

[English]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member asking me to explain, but more importantly, he should stand right now and explain why Bloc members voted against all our investments in Quebec: the upgrading of two drinking water centres in Baie-Comeau; the renovated Beauceville cultural and sports centre in Quebec. They voted against every infrastructure investment in Quebec. They are not standing up for the people of Quebec. They are not standing up for the economy and the jobs and for a better quality of life.

I invite the member to stand in his place right now and explain to the people of Quebec why he voted against every job that has been created. He voted against every one of the 430,000 jobs that have been created in this country and also every single one of them in Quebec. Bloc members do not stand up for Quebeckers. It is the Conservative members from Quebec who stand up for Quebeckers. This Conservative government will continue to do so, notwithstanding their position on this.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is full of it. When we think about the fact that the Conservative Party required the coalition with the Bloc for the first two budgets, the government actually cozied up with the Bloc to get its first two budgets passed.

It is unfair to characterize my colleague with not supporting everything in Quebec. That is just not true because the first two Conservative budgets would not have passed in the House of Commons had it not been for the government's coalition with the Bloc. It is a reality and the parliamentary secretary cannot run away from that.

Let us ask him a question about why is this coalition with the Bloc—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please.

The hon. parliamentary secretary, a short answer please.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I am more than happy to do so, but see how the parties are getting together over there. It is a coalition, there is no question. They want an unnecessary election, an expensive election that this government does not want. We do not want it and the Canadian people do not want it.

Opposition members should explain why they would give their intentions of voting against the budget without even reading it. They do not even know what is in it and yet they vote against it. The Bloc votes against it.

I am full of it. I have a lot more examples: highway 73 for \$75 million; route 185 for \$241 million. Bloc members voted against investments in their own province for their own people. They should be ashamed of themselves.

[Translation]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Bloc Québécois for moving this opposition motion today. It is a very good and relevant way to ring alarm bells across the country regarding our concerns about the state of democracy in Canada.

I will repeat the motion:

That this House denounce the conduct of the government, its disregard for democracy and its determination to go to any lengths to advance its partisan interests and impose its regressive ideology, as it did by justifying the Conservative Party's circumvention of the rules on election spending in the 2005-2006 election campaign, when the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism used public funds to solicit donations to the Conservative Party, when the Party used taxpayers' money to finance a pre-election campaign under the guise of promoting Canada's Economic Action Plan, when it changed the wording in government communications to promote itself, when it showed that it is acceptable for a minister to alter a document and make misleading statements to the House, when it refused to provide a parliamentary committee with the costs of its proposals, and when it improperly prorogued Parliament.

•(1135)

[English]

The whole motion is a litany of a clear demonstration of abuse of power.

Lawrence Martin, in his column in the *Globe and Mail* on Tuesday, said, "It's not the parts that count but the sum of the parts. Which invites the question: Is anyone doing the math?"

In the preface of Donald Savoie's book, *Power: Where Is It?*, he says:

My hope is that this book will shed some light on how the current situation came about and why. More particularly, I hope that it will prompt citizens to take a strong and informed interest in the state of their political and administrative institutions and organizations.

I hope the debate today will do that for Canadians as well.

There is a lament that Canadians still do not really understand the difference between Parliament and government. In a parliamentary democracy, it is the job of all parliamentarians to hold the government to account, the government meaning the executive cabinet and the public service.

Even though the motion of the Bloc Québécois only cites the government, there is also a lament for the fact that the Conservative members of Parliament do not understand that it is their job to hold their government to account as well. They have totally abdicated their responsibility, particularly today. They actually refuse to debate this very important motion and do nothing but speak about another brochure for the economic action plan.

It is important, particularly today, after the historic ruling of the Speaker of the House yesterday, that the civic literacy of Canadians be raised such that they too understand and be uncomfortable that this very institution has been degraded. The very institution of a parliamentary democracy is much lessened.

That the members opposite find it impossible to defend the indefensible or to speak to the important items in this motion makes them complicit in the concerns that we have about the government. I regret and also lament that this is in a chamber that was made for hon. members to do our part in holding the government to account and speak and vote for what we believe to be true and just.

It is ironic that in the very foundation document of the Reform Party of Canada, written by the now Prime Minister, the description of an assault on a democracy was:

Many of our most serious problems as a country can be traced to the apathy and non-involvement of Canadians in public affairs, and to decisions that too frequently ignore the popular will.... We believe in accountability of elected representatives to the people who elect them, and that the duty of elected members to their constituents should supersede their obligations to their political parties.

It is quite interesting how quickly the Prime Minister forgot that.

It was extraordinary to hear the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons say, on Tuesday:

The tyranny of the opposition majority has been reckless and irresponsible in its demands for the production of documents that would breach cabinet confidence, and now the tyranny of the majority is being reckless and irresponsible with the long-standing practice and principle of parliamentary democracy, the sub judice convention, by passing judgment on individuals without any respect for due process.

Another member opposite called this a “kangaroo court”. This morning we had a member opposite heckle that this was a “garbage motion”.

There is nothing more serious in the state of our democracy. As the parliamentary procedure expert, Ned Franks, said:

—no government in Canadian history has been cited so many times for ignoring the rights of Parliament.

He offered two possible explanations:

[The rulings] suggest, to put it kindly, that the government is, at a minimum, ignorant of the rules and principles governing parliamentary democracy and, to put it unkindly, that they don't give a damn and they'll try to get away with what they can.

• (1140)

As the leader of the official opposition has said:

These are very clear and crushing judgments. They make it clear that this Speaker believes this government does not respect the democratic principles at the heart of our democracy.

He has stated that Canadians will have will have two questions about the Prime Minister:

Can you trust him with power? Can you trust him to respect the institutions that keep us free?

In the *Globe and Mail* this morning there was a definition of “contempt”:

Contempt in its ordinary meaning is not terribly far off the legal one, and it is that ordinary meaning—lack of respect, intense dislike, scorn—that offers a useful guide to understanding Wednesday's ruling by Speaker Peter Milliken. The government has scorned Parliament, and shown—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I would ask all hon. members to refrain from identifying members by their names, including the Speakers.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett:

The government has scorned Parliament, and shown a lack of respect to the people entrusted by Canadians to represent their interests...

Business of Supply

The editorial concludes:

It is unacceptable that the government needs to be lectured by the Speaker on how to live within the rules of Canadian democracy.

I believe that speaks to the Bloc motion today.

We have been worried for a long time. The hon. member from Mount Royal said a long time ago that Parliament had been caught in a pincer movement between an activist judiciary and an ever more powerful executive branch.

Others have bemoaned the fact that sometimes governments view this Parliament as a minor process obstacle. Others have suggested that this now has become a suggestion box that we hang Christmas lights on once a year.

The late Jim Travers pointed out that the mantra on the Hill is now, “It has taken 500 years to wrestle power from the king and 50 years to get it back into one man's office”.

It was over two years ago that the late Jim Travers wrote his award-winning article, “The quiet unravelling of Canadian democracy”, when he compared his experience as a foreign correspondent in Africa to what is happening now.

He said:

Read the headlines, examine the evidence, plot the trend line dots and find that as Africans—from turnaround Ghana to impoverished Malawi—struggle to strengthen their democracies, Canadians are letting theirs slip.

He went on to say:

Once-solid institutions are being pulled apart by rising complexity and falling legitimacy.

He said that it would have been unthinkable that 30 years ago he would have:

—rejected out of hand the suggestion that Parliament would become a largely ceremonial body incapable of performing its defining functions of safeguarding public spending and holding ministers to account.

I think he would have been very happy by the Speaker's ruling yesterday.

He went on to say is:

—every one has happened and each has chipped away another brick of the democratic foundations underpinning Parliament. Incrementally and by stealth, Canada has become a situational democracy. What matters now is what works. Precedents, procedures and even laws have given way to the political doctrine of expediency.

He said:

Prime ministers are freeing themselves from the chains that once bound them to voters, Parliament, cabinet and party. From bottom to top, from citizen to head of state, every link in those chains is stressed, fractured or broken.

He concluded that famous article with:

If war is too serious to leave to generals, then surely democracy is too important to delegate to politicians.

I believe the Bloc Québécois motion today is a cry to all Canadians to come and help. We must. The cornerstone of every democracy is that citizens are actually paying attention.

Business of Supply

In Robin Sears' article in *Policy Options* in the fall, he talked about that the problem with Parliament was not so much the gridlock of the minority House, it was the systemic issue found in all political capitals, namely, the growth in the power of the executive branch and the consequent decline in the role of the legislatures.

What we are really limiting here today is when we have that kind of concentration of power, we actually then have to rely on the person with the power to act with integrity. The Prime Minister and the government has nothing but contempt for democratic institutions. He thinks he makes the rules and tries to get around any restrictions placed on his power. In fact, in Tuktoyaktuk last summer, when asked if he had a licence when he was driving an ATV, he let it slip that he made the rules.

Yesterday, in Frances Russell's column, she said of the government:

It is dismantling, layer by layer, nearly 150 years of Canadian parliamentary democracy. Into the trash can has gone respect for the institution and traditions of Parliament, moderation in public discourse, toleration of differences of opinion, respect for civil society's institutions and even, at times, respect for the rule of law.

Politics outside Parliament has descended into a cesspool of perpetual savage political attack ads. The poisonous hyperpartisanship of the American permanent election campaign is the new Canadian norm. Inside Parliament, the opposition is largely unable to hold government to account because ministers treat opposition MPs with flippancy, disdain, contempt, derision and insults.

● (1145)

On her blog yesterday, Susan Delacourt was trying to draw the distinction between value and values. She said that for the past five years the Conservatives have gambled, that voters only care about value, as we can certainly see today from the pathetic attempt of the Conservatives to defend themselves in their speeches. She said:

But if our collective attention turns to values, surrounding ethics, respect, character and idea-based politics, the Conservatives could be at a distinct disadvantage.

There may also be a conversation about value, about the value of this institution, the value of members of Parliament, and particularly the value of members of Parliament on the government side who have to expect better of their government at many times.

I remember when I was a new member of Parliament there were many times when we had to, as women's caucus or as backbench MPs, expect our government to do better. Whether it was to protect habitat on the endangered species bill or to do better for people with mental illness on the disability tax credit, we as parliamentarians, even sitting on the government side, were very organized in getting our government to do the right thing and to do better for Canadians. That is what hon. members do.

We cannot expect members of Parliament to just suit up in their team jerseys and treat this place like a sporting event, spewing forth talking points, quite often either purposely misleading, purposely saying half-truths or actual outright lies. It is sad to see this place where members of Parliament from the government side think that is what they were sent here to do, to just do the bidding of the government instead of actually doing their job as members of Parliament and holding government to account.

Albert Einstein once said that anyone who does not take truth seriously in small matters cannot be trusted in large ones either.

It is astounding that so many of the items mentioned in the Bloc motion are really about not telling the truth. It is about lying on the smallest things, but it is also deliberate selection of the facts to purposely mislead. When the government said that the Conservative Party had been exonerated at the lower court, it was actually misleading Canadians by saying that the in and out scandal had been okayed by the court. It was very clear in that judgment that it was not at all. Clearly, in the judgment the court said that it wanted the Director of Public Prosecutions to continue its work, which of course ended up in four charges being laid.

This seems to be a government that does not want to tell the truth, where the end justifies the means. It is a government that prefers to play only with people who agree with it and discredits those who challenge it. We believe that Canadians would prefer a government that just tells the truth. We believe that many governments can balance a budget. The current government does not seem to be able to. However, Canadians require and should be able to expect actual truthfulness and a competent and honest government that will actually govern.

As can be seen by the details in the Bloc motion, it is a government that has done nothing but run an administration that campaigns. It is a campaign machine. It is not a government. It actually refuses to govern and refuses to abide by the rules.

● (1150)

Democracy is sometimes messy. Sometimes it is slow. Sometimes it requires space and time. However, this kind of top-down, autocratic decision-making which actually means that people can get around the rules or even break them is a very sad day for Canadian democracy.

Integrity means that people will act within the rules, act in the public good, even when they are not being watched.

The government came to power saying that it was going to improve transparency and accountability, and it has gone in exactly the opposite direction.

Even on the accountability front, if the Conservatives believe what is right is what one gets away with and what is wrong is what one gets caught doing, even when the Conservatives get caught, all they do is say that everybody else did it, even if that is not the truth.

The British North America Act talks about passing laws and peace, order and good government.

The Bloc Québécois motion says that we do not have good government and we have a government that does not think it needs to act in the best interests of Canadians or within the law.

In honour of the late Jim Travers, whose parting benediction was always to fly straight, I think today we hope, in his memory, the government will fly straight or that we will get another government that will.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my Liberal colleague and thank her for her excellent speech. We appreciate her intellectual analysis of the issues.

She said that Canadian democracy was built brick by brick, but it could also be said that it was built stone by stone. But right now the Conservative government is trying to dismantle it through various means, including by denying democracy to the point where the Conservatives are telling Bloc members that they are not legitimate in the House and that they are useless. When the Conservatives are in opposition, we will return the message.

The Conservatives travelled across Canada and spent \$250 million on 80 events during the break week as part of a pre-election campaign. They ignored the fact that the Government of Canada, not the government of the Prime Minister, was footing the bill. What does my colleague think?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be supporting the Bloc motion. I think that the money spent on these trips and on ads served to promote partisan Conservative policies and opinions. I am also very concerned about the television ads.

• (1155)

[English]

On the economic action plan, there is an advertisement from the Government of Canada that says “includes tax cuts”. It is not a recruiting poster. This is not telling people to pay their taxes or to buy Canada savings bonds. This is pure partisan government-funded nonsense.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I would remind all hon. members to direct their comments and questions to the Chair.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Huron—Bruce.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, if I go back to the motion where it mentions “advance its partisan interests and oppose its regressive ideology”, perhaps the member may want to get off her high horse. She may remember a ten percenter which she would have signed off on and which she sent into a riding in northern Saskatchewan. There were pictures of body bags on the ten percenter. Perhaps when she is thinking about her speech about truth and ideology and all these highbrow concepts, she may think back to her own actions. Maybe she would have a response to that. We need to see both sides here.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that ten percenter was right. I have already apologized to the aboriginal people.

At that time I was equally passionate about the lack of action on our aboriginal people, the fact that there were 10 to 12 people living in one house with no running water in those communities I went to in northern Manitoba. That situation has not improved at all. I feel as passionate about that now as I did when the ten percenter went out. I agree that was wrong. That is why we, on this side of the House, moved to abolish ten percenters going into other ridings.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are 65 members who in the 2006 election spent over their limit

and were able to claim rebates, illegally. This did not happen with any other party. It did not happen with the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party or the Bloc. It happened only with the Conservative Party. Interestingly enough, it did not replicate itself. It did not happen again in the election in 2008.

Why would a party whose candidates were caught red-handed five years ago continue to deny, sort of in a Nixon style, rather than try to settle? I know that it has been done in other jurisdictions. I am sure Elections Canada would be flexible enough that if a party came clean with its indiscretions, a settlement could be reached. But no, the Conservatives decided to deny, deny, deny. That has been their *modus operandi* in all aspects of government. At the end of the day, it is going to be their undoing. That is what I firmly believe.

I would like to ask the member whether she agrees with that.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party of Canada had the audacity to go to court to try to get those rebates, those ill-gotten dollars back.

What was very telling was the riding association of Hull—Aylmer had \$12,000 in the bank before it got its transfer from the national party, and after the rebate, it had \$36,000 ready to fight another election.

Obviously the Director of Public Prosecutions decided to target those four high-ranking people in the party. Eventually they will have to pay that money back.

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the member for Elmwood—Transcona was up asking questions about the government party making good, I thought it would have been appropriate for him to suggest that the Liberal Party which apparently stole \$40 million from the taxpayers during the adscam episode might like to make good on the \$40 million, plus interest.

Would the member for St. Paul's like to tell the House whether her party is going to pay the \$40 million plus interest back to the Canadian people which the Liberal Party stole during the adscam scandal, and which Liberal Party officials were convicted in court for and went to jail?

Is the Liberal Party going to pay back the \$40 million or not? I do not need a long speech, just a good yes or no would be fine.

• (1200)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I think the Liberal Party of Canada paid dearly for that, and we have learned our lesson.

I would like to draw to the member's attention that with respect to the Gomery investigation, it was a public servant, two advertising executives and a low-ranking member of the party who actually ended up being accused. It was not the four top-ranking people, as it is with the Conservative Party of Canada. Also, out of the problems with the advertising problem the Liberal Party endured came the Gomery hearings and his recommendations, which the Conservative Party of Canada campaigned on. If we look at all those recommendations, the Conservative Party has implemented virtually none of them.

In fact, today's motion speaks to the fact of how the Conservatives really are in contempt of this place and of the law.

Business of Supply

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to recognize my colleague's reference in her speech to the late Jim Travers and what he might think if he were here to comment and write an editorial on the erosion of democracy as it is unfolding today under the guidance of the Conservative government. What does she think, as a close personal friend, his reaction would have been?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, I think Mr. Travers would have been heartened by the decision of the Speaker yesterday.

We need to ensure that many of us take up the torch to ensure that Canadians understand that their parliamentary democracy is at risk.

I remember one of Mr. Travers' columns crashed the *Toronto Star* website in terms of the interest. We just have to keep going in his honour.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from St. Paul's for making reference to Jim Travers who recently passed away. I will begin my speech where she left off in her remarks as to what Mr. Travers may think of the state of democracy as it is today.

I will remind members and all Canadians that our democracy is a fragile construct at best. If we are not vigilant in reinforcing it, buttressing it and strengthening it in everything we do, then the inverse is true. It begins to diminish, deteriorate and to be undermined incrementally. These incremental changes are sometimes so subtle that we hardly notice them, but when compiled they create a critical mass that, without overstating things, threatens the integrity of the democracy that we are duty bound to uphold in the House of Commons today.

In a seminal piece of political commentary that Jim Travers wrote on April 4, 2009, for which he won the 2009 National Newspaper Award, he pointed out that, as a foreign correspondent for many years, he witnessed democracy beginning to unfold in many of his postings in Africa and other places he lived. At the same time as he was watching the state of democracy in those underdeveloped nations, he thought of Canada, as he put it, as a cold but shimmering Camelot where ballots, not bullets, changed governments, where men and women in uniform were discreet servants of the state, where our institutions were structurally sound, where corruption was firmly enough in check that scandals were aberrations, demanding public scrutiny and sometimes even justice. He went on to lament that he was witnessing Canadians allowing their democracy slip.

I forgot to mention that I will be splitting my time with my colleague for Hamilton Centre.

My colleague from Hamilton Centre and I both attended Jim Travers' memorial on Tuesday night, along with about 1,000 well-wishers from all walks of life, but notably politicians, journalists and people in those industries, lamenting his loss.

Mr. Travers pointed out that our Camelot was under siege because, as I point out, incrementally, step by step, death by 1,000 cuts, we are witnessing the erosion and the deterioration of the institution that our fathers very proudly built up. He stated what his response would have been in the 1980s, by saying:

I would have rejected out of hand the suggestion that Parliament would become a largely ceremonial body incapable of performing its defining functions of

safeguarding public spending and holding ministers to account. I would have treated as ridiculous any forecast that the senior bureaucracy would become politicized, that many of the powers of a monarch would flow from Parliament to the prime minister or that the authority of the Governor General, the de facto head of state, would be openly challenged.

Yet every one has happened and each has chipped away another brick of the democratic foundations underpinning Parliament. Incrementally and by stealth, Canada has become a situational democracy. What matters now is what works. Precedents, procedures and even laws have given way to the political doctrine of expediency.

That sets the framework for the debate we are having today on the Bloc Quebecois' opposition day motion that is blowing the whistle, sounding the alarm, sending an alert to Canadians that if we are not careful the very institutions by which we define ourselves as Canadians will be undermined, diminished and, in fact, will disappear.

• (1205)

There were a series of events leading up to the opposition day motion that outlines the threat to democracy. I will frame my remarks by citing the opening of this opposition day motion.

That this House denounce the conduct of the government, its disregard for democracy and its determination to go to any lengths to advance its partisan interests and impose its regressive ideology....

I will not go on, but I would say that it is at the expense of putting the best interests of Canadians first and the lofty ideals of accountability and transparency that the Conservatives promised Canadians when they took power five years ago.

I will begin with the in and out scandal itself, which is one of three offences that we are citing here today.

We want our government to fix health care, not elections. It offends the sensibilities of Canadians to see a systematic, deliberate, premeditated and well-orchestrated conspiracy to defraud the spending limits of the Canada Elections Act.

I would mention that the spending limits of the Canada Elections Act is one of the fundamental cornerstones of our democracy and, I believe, it is one of the things that differentiates us from the Americans. We believe big money in the United States has undermined democracy to a great extent. We believe in this country that nobody should be able to buy an election based on having deeper pockets or a fatter chequebook. Yet, that is exactly what the Conservatives have done by willingly and knowingly put in place a scheme to exceed the spending limits and gain an unfair competitive advantage over the other parties.

All we want is a level playing field so that Canadians can decide the merits of a party based on its policies, platform and promises, not based on being carpet bombed and blitzed by advertising campaigns that have little to do with what the government actually intends to do.

Business of Supply

I will point out the echo effect of this offence. It is even more egregious that these riding associations that conspired with their party to defraud the Canada Elections Act enjoy an echo effect in that the ill-gotten gains from the first offence went on to bankroll the Conservatives' next election campaign in 2008, compounding the offence.

I point out as well that there is a whole second tier to the in and out scandal, which has been talked about very little. While 67 riding associations conspired to defraud the spending limits for advertising purposes, another 50 riding associations conspired to defraud the spending limits on polling. This is rarely talked about. Sixteen of those 50 riding associations conducted complete in and out transactions, such as the member for Essex I believe, where \$20,000 were transferred into their bank accounts and within 24 hours or so that same \$20,000 was transferred out. However, this time they said that it was for polling.

What a ludicrous notion. No one would ever conduct a public opinion poll in his or her riding in the middle of an election campaign. It would be a complete waste of money. However, the national party spends hundreds of thousands of dollars on daily national polls throughout an election campaign.

In this case, the second ridiculous thing is that one could not spend \$20,000 on a local poll in one riding association. I do not think it can be done. I have had estimates and they range from \$2,500 to \$4,500 for a 400-person, 20-question survey. This was a way for the federal party to exceed its spending limits and call national expenses local expenses so that it could also get the rebate in its local riding association.

I look forward to the RCMP and the Director of Public Prosecutions expanding the charges laid to include this second polling scheme.

Let us not forget that when the Conservative government says that it is co-operating fully with the investigation, the RCMP had to kick down the doors of the Conservative Party headquarters with a search warrant and seize all of its records and documents. It did not do it co-operatively.

We also must not forget that 31 summons were issued by the ethics committee and the Conservatives advised 31 people to ignore the summons to the ethics committee. That is an erosion of parliamentary democracy.

• (1210)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Winnipeg Centre for outlining some of the reasons that we will be pleased to support this motion. It is the second opposition day motion this week that speaks to the falling fortunes of the current government and explains why.

Like my colleague, I want to focus on the initial part of the opposition day motion, which reads:

That this House denounce the conduct of the government, its disregard for democracy and its determination to go to any lengths to advance its partisan interests and impose its regressive ideology—

It is really difficult to know where to begin. The government has given us an embarrassment of riches for comment on its the disregard for democracy.

Let me preface my comments by acknowledging that being partisan and engaging in partisan activities are part of this place and part of what we do. It is recognized in the guidelines that the role of an MP, among other things, is also to be a member of a party and to participate in caucus activities that, by their nature, are partisan. That is a given.

However, what is so important to the integrity of our democracy and our parliamentary system is to recognize and, more importantly, respect the parameters of that partisan activity, particularly as they apply to being in government.

We are on a very dangerous slippery slope and are accelerating quickly.

One of the most important things about our parliamentary system is the fundamental starting point that all members are honourable and all members are honest. Now, being human, that does not always hold to the end of the day, but that is an important part of how we start. That is why people are referred to as "the hon. member". And so to mislead the House in any way, or mislead fellow parliamentarians in committee, and quite frankly, not to tell the truth, is a huge issue. It is a very big deal in our parliamentary system because without respect for those parameters, we are ultimately left with chaos.

If there is not a set of rules accepted and respected by everyone, that means that everyone feels free to work outside the rules, basically becoming outlaws. Yet without laws, we are in chaos.

The government wants it both ways: It wants the rules for the rest of Canadians but to be able itself to do and say what it wants as long as it furthers the business, not of Canada or the "H" government, but the partisan interests of the Conservative Party of Canada.

After talking about misleading members and misrepresenting the truth, let me start with the fact that the government has said for days, weeks, and months now that it does not want an election. I am sure the Conservatives would be quite prepared to jump up on their hind legs right now and say, "We don't want an election. We support what our Prime Minister has said and our government House leader and everyone. We don't want an election." The Prime Minister says it. The most senior ministers of the government and all the back-benchers all say, "We don't want an election".

They do not want an election, and yet on March 3, just a few days ago, my colleague from Alberta received a document, which I understand was hand delivered. Our own mistake with the same member of the Conservatives was due to confusion with last names, and someone got a phone call and an email that they should not have. However, my understanding is that this document was hand delivered. But I will leave that aside.

What is interesting about this right now is the way they talk about ethnic groups and ethnicity. It is a pretty sensitive subject in this country. A lot of people feel that some of the language in this document and the way the Conservatives have looked at some things are getting close to the line.

Business of Supply

●(1215)

However, I want to focus on the following. Remember that this whole PowerPoint presentation was about urging ridings to get involved and to try to find another \$200,000, as if the Conservatives did not have enough money in their war chest. They are squeezing the riding associations to come up with another \$200,000 so they can do an advertising buy.

The focus for me, to tie it to what I commented on earlier, is the presentation's reference to "TV Buy Costs—Pre Writ". It refers to a "Heavy deployment over Two Weeks (Starting March 15)", with the "Official 'Launch' on March 20 (India Cricket Match)". This was to be "Pre Writ", starting on March 15. The letter is dated March 3. The only way to have a pre-writ period is when one knows when that writ period will be. Lest anybody wonder, the writ period is an election. So these are pre-election activities starting on March 15.

The government has not been telling Canadians the truth. It is ready and eager for an election. It does not want to be seen that way, but there is the proof.

An. hon. member: Please, speak up a bit.

Mr. David Christopherson: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member says he cannot hear me. I will be glad to speak up a bit so that he can hear every single word of these condemnations. If he continues, I will take a moment to wait until he gets his seat so that I can mention this to him personally, if he wants to continue this back and forth.

The presentation refers to pre-writ weeks and March 15. Yet the Prime Minister has been telling people that he does not want an election and that it is the irresponsible coalition that wants the election because it does not care about Canadians. He claims he is telling Canadians the truth that he does not want an election, yet the Conservatives' own documents make it very clear that we are now in the pre pre-writ period and that all of this will culminate in an election. It looks like an election is coming.

I so hope that in this period, when we talk about integrity and honesty, we will get a chance to talk about what has happened with KAIROS. This issue itself is enough for this government to be condemned for denying funding for church groups that are doing excellent humanitarian work. I have not yet heard a criticism of the work KAIROS does other than some false things from the government. That alone is an issue, but let me take it to the next step, to the Minister of International Cooperation.

I have a copy of a document with three signatures. The first one is of the acting vice-president of the Canadian partnership branch of CIDA. Under that signature is the signature of the president, and I am assuming that is the president of the Canadian partnership branch. Just above the signature lines is the recommendation:

—that you [meaning the minister] sign below to indicate you approve a contribution of \$7,098,758 over four years to the above program.

Might I also just note that on this page it also says:

Primary local partner—the organization works with 23 well-established local partners trusted by KAIROS.

The benefits this organization shows for that work that it does are just exponential.

Anyway, the two officials who signed the document recommended that funding be approved. After these senior people signed the document recommending the funding to the minister, the minister either personally inserted the word "not" or personally directed that it be inserted.

I want to give KAIROS credit on this. I saw one of its t-shirts that said "KAIROS is going away", but it had the word "not" in a red circle. The t-shirt was out within 48 hours, which I thought was brilliant.

They changed this after those people signed the document—

●(1220)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his remarks, especially the volume of his remarks. It made it easy for me to hear and I did not need to use any amplification. We could probably save some taxpayer dollars on the amplification system.

I want to ask the member if he is familiar with Mr. Robin Sears, the former national campaign director of the New Democratic Party. I had the occasion to speak to Mr. Sears recently in Toronto with respect to the arrangement known as the in and out arrangement. He told me very clearly that the New Democratic Party had in fact been doing exactly that for years, and that all parties did it. He did not understand what the big fuss was all about. He said on the CTV News channel on February 25, 2011:

It's a load of nonsense—the guys at Elections Canada have a few bricks short of a load. Every party plays games with moving money around, have always done, will always do. What's a national ad, what's a local ad? It's nonsense. It's time we got back to things Canadians care about.

This is a direct quote from the former national campaign manager of the New Democratic Party. Perhaps the hon. member could comment on that.

●(1225)

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, I would suggest to my colleague that what matters a heck of a lot more than any one person's opinion is the fact that the federal prosecutor has laid charges. Charges were not laid against the other three parties.

Of course there are transfers—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. Order, please. I would ask hon. members to ask questions and make comments after they have been recognized. The hon. member for Hamilton Centre has the floor.

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to engage with my colleagues across the way. It is part of the fun of this.

Business of Supply

However, my answer to him is that what matters is the fact that the federal prosecutor has laid a charge. It does not matter what the hon. member thinks of me or anyone else, quite frankly. Elections Canada is backing it up. It knows there are constant transfers between federal and local ridings. Yes, these happen all the time. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs has said that all of the actions on the part of the three opposition parties were perfectly legal. What that points to is the fact obviously that there is some question about whether or not the Conservatives' activities are legal, and it looks as if they are not.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Madam Speaker, in his speech earlier—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I ask for a little order on both sides of the House, please, so that I can hear the question and the comment being made.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes.

Mr. Luc Malo: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

In his speech earlier, the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, a minister of the Crown, said that the Bloc Québécois motion talks about Canada's economic action plan. The motion is actually about transparency. The minister's statement is an attempt to mislead the public by omission, and that is just as damaging as lying or any other method of hiding the truth. In fact, the Bloc Québécois motion condemns the government for:

...its determination to go to any lengths to advance its partisan interests and impose its regressive ideology...as it did...when the Party used taxpayers' money to finance a pre-election campaign under the guise of promoting Canada's Economic Action Plan...

And that is what we would have liked to hear the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean and minister of the Crown comment on. I would simply like to ask my colleague if he believes that the government was in fact trying to promote its partisan interests through its promotion of Canada's economic action plan.

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, I think it is pretty self-evident. The latest example is the minister of immigration giving out scrolls, which we all do. These have the coat of arms of Canada and of all the provinces and territories, except that mine, and I do not think of any other members on this side of the House, are not embossed or watermarked with the Conservative Party logo.

We have seen all kinds of these examples of the election signs. I am sorry, but I meant to say the economic action plan signs, but they are almost the same thing in many of our minds. We have seen members standing there with cheques, giving out Canadian money like it is coming out of their own pockets.

Yes, the Conservatives responded to the economic crisis, but let us remember that they did it under the threat of losing power, and when they did it, they saw it more as an opportunity for themselves rather than a necessary measure for Canadians.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé. My remarks will be a bit more moderate, but my message will come across just the same.

I am pleased to take the floor today to demonstrate to the House the government's disregard for democracy and its determination to go to any lengths to advance its partisan interests and impose its regressive ideology. As soon as it was elected, in January 2006, the Conservative government radically changed Canada's official development assistance and foreign policies by concentrating on its own economic and trade vision.

It deliberately abandoned the African continent. Up until then, African countries were getting a sizeable portion of our official development assistance budget. In 2009, the Conservative government decided Africa would no longer be a priority, and eight African countries were dropped from the priority list, including Rwanda, Niger, Burkina Faso and Benin. The 2005 list included 14 African countries, but only 7 were left on the 2009 list.

The Conservative government preferred to prioritize countries with which it is signing or negotiating free trade agreements, such as Ukraine, Colombia, Peru and Honduras. Although these countries do experience poverty, CIDA's 2005 list of priority countries included more poor countries than the 2009 list. Under the Conservative government, Canada's foreign policy has become merely a trade policy.

Over many decades, Quebecers and Canadians earned a good reputation abroad thanks to their respect for human rights and international law and their fervent support for democracy, advocating diplomacy rather than the use of force. A majority of Canadians still support these values and principles, but since the Conservatives are in power, economic prosperity, militarism and the security agenda have replaced the values that once were so distinctively Canadian on the world scene.

This is another example of how this government has imposed its regressive ideology on Canada's official development assistance. During the G8 and G20 summits in June 2010, the government said that one of its priorities was maternal health, a millennium development goal. That is a very commendable and admirable priority. However, CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency, refuses to fund abortion, even though many experts say it should be included in order to cover all women's health needs.

The women of Quebec and Canada have won this freedom of choice, and the debate is closed. In Canada, women have the right to choose to end a pregnancy and they have access to all the care and services required for that choice. So why did the government remove all funding for abortion in its assistance plan for women in developing countries, if not to appease groups that advocate this conservative ideology?

Business of Supply

Since coming to power, Conservative members have been introducing bills meant to surreptitiously reopen the abortion debate. One such example is Bill C-484 introduced by the member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park. That bill would have given a legal status to a fetus, which has no such status under current laws.

Another perfect example is Bill C-510 introduced by the member for Winnipeg South. That bill patronizes women by implying they are frequently coerced into abortion, but the vast majority of women make their own decision to have an abortion and take full responsibility for it. It is clear that, once again, the Conservative government was trying to limit a woman's right to choose regarding abortion, by making women feel isolated when making such a decision.

• (1230)

This government will stop at nothing to promote its partisan interests and impose its regressive ideology, as it demonstrated with non-governmental organizations, civil society representatives and human rights groups.

The government is refusing or cutting funding for organizations that dare to criticize it, question its motives or voice a different opinion. The Canadian Council for International Co-operation, or the CCIC, and KAIROS, two organizations that are internationally recognized and known for their excellent work, had their funding requests denied by CIDA.

All of the controversy surrounding the refusal of funding for KAIROS clearly shows that the Conservative government is prepared to go so far as to allow a minister to falsify documents and make misleading statements to the House in order to ensure that there is no deviation from its ideology and that it can freely promote its partisan interests.

Shocked and disturbed by this behaviour, the members of the opposition raised a question of privilege. Yesterday, the Speaker of the House ruled that the Minister of International Cooperation did indeed abuse the privileges enjoyed by members of the House of Commons and that she could be found in contempt of Parliament if the opposition decides to take the matter that far. What is outrageous is that the government's ideology is harmful to democracy. We condemn the autocratic approach of the government, which has demonstrated on numerous occasions its total lack of respect for democracy and the parliamentary system.

The government has gone even further by imposing its regressive ideology on projects that it funds abroad. The government fears the unions in Canada, so it tries to stifle them abroad. Canada could help to improve the situation of workers in Mexico and other southern countries, but the Government of Canada is refusing or cutting funding for cooperative programs with labour organizations. CIDA ended funding for the CSN and the Centre international de solidarité ouvrière for their projects designed to support workers in the south.

Not only has the government interfered politically in official development assistance and let pro-life groups dictate its policies, but it is also slowly destroying Canada's image abroad. It goes even further. It is even changing the terminology public servants should use. International organizations and NGOs have all agreed on a common terminology, but it seems it does not suit the Conservative

government anymore. In order to avoid the key words often used by women's organizations and other groups dedicated to the protection of rights, the Conservatives are imposing a whole new terminology on diplomats.

Under the Conservatives, "gender equality" does not exist anymore. It has been replaced by "equality between men and women". We should not talk about "child soldiers", but". The terminology is being changed. When talking about rape in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the word "impunity" has been replaced by "prevention". These are serious changes that show how much this government is under the influence of its strong right wing.

The crisis in the Rights and Democracy organization revealed the true face of the Conservatives. By appointing people who subscribe to the Conservative ideology to the board, the government could keep this organization under its control. But this organization should be instead at arm's length from the Canadian government if it is to perform its work adequately and keep its credibility.

There is a long list of actions taken by the Conservative government to change Canada's foreign policy to please its partisan base. The government does not realize how badly it is tarnishing Canada's image abroad. When it failed, last fall, to win a seat on the UN Security Council, it should have understood that its radical positions are hurting its diplomatic relations.

• (1235)

In conclusion, the fundamental concern we all have is how far the Conservative government is willing to go to promote its regressive ideology.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government has been very carefully orchestrating, almost like a play, over the last few weeks. It is saying that it is not interested in an election. Yet, through accident, the only way to describe it, a document entitled: "Breaking Through—Building the Conservative Brand in Cultural Communities", a Conservative ethnic paid media strategy, was delivered to the member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

In it the Conservatives clearly identify their program. They are trying to shake down riding associations in their party for a donation to the campaign. However, they do specify that the TV buy that they are talking about is pre-writ and it says "heavy deployment over two weeks starting March 15". I presume in another few days we are going to be hearing ads on the stations on which they are advertising and the official launch is March 20 for the India cricket match.

Does the member agree that this presents a very compelling argument that the government really does want an election and it is simply working to engineer its own defeat?

Business of Supply

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. I think that the facts speak for themselves. Although this government repeats ad nauseum that it does not want an election and that Canadians do not want an election, we have demonstrated that the Canadian government is already in an election campaign and is using everything it can to promote its Economic Action Plan. Even his colleague who spoke previously clearly showed this and proved it with a document.

With its motion today, the Bloc Québécois wants to show that this government, on the one hand, is saying that it wants to be transparent and, on the other, through the list of events attached to the motion, is only promoting its own partisan interests in order to impose its ideology.

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comments.

When our NDP colleague said previously that the government was preparing for an election, even though the government says repeatedly that there will be no election, we need only recall the promise broken by the Prime Minister himself. He had a bill adopted in the House, stating that elections would be held on a fixed date from now on, every four years. But, in September 2008, he decided all by himself, totally unexpectedly and without respecting his bill, to call an election.

How can we believe the Prime Minister when he says that he does not want to call an election, when he is, himself, willing to break the laws that he promoted, presented and had adopted in this House, like the bill relating to fixed election dates every four years?

My colleague spoke about breaking the most elementary rules of democracy, and we need only think about prorogation. When this House decides to adopt bills, to reach a consensus to move in the direction of common interest, public interest, and when this does not suit the government and does not fit in with its ideology—the member spoke about ideology—it decides to shut down Parliament. I would ask my colleague to comment on that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle has less than a minute to answer.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Madam Speaker, that is hardly enough time, but in short, the Bloc opposition day motion today wants respectfully to show that the Conservative government is prepared to do anything, that it does not like to abide by democratic rules and that it sees Parliament as an obstacle that must be circumvented. It is prepared to go so far as to prorogue this House when it feels cornered or to use whatever means necessary to impose its ideology and maintain the same direction it has been taking in order to please the conservative base.

• (1245)

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois.

It is clear to us that the Conservative Party does not like to abide by democratic rules and that it sees Parliament as an obstacle to be circumvented. We see that again today in the speeches made by the Conservatives on the motion moved by the Bloc Québécois. We saw

the minister and other Conservative Party MPs make speeches on the economic action plan of Canada. This motion makes no mention of an economic plan. We are denouncing situations that have come up over the past few months in the House showing this government's lack of transparency and democracy.

Three times in one year, this government has been found guilty of having abused the privileges of parliamentarians and Parliament. In one case, it was demonstrated that the government refused, before the Standing Committee on Finance, to discuss and disclose the costs of the measures it was proposing. Not only did the Conservative government try to prevent the members of the Standing Committee on Finance from accessing the information they needed to do their work properly, but in addition, they tried to hide this by tabling documents in the House of Commons that were in no way what hon. members had asked for. This is virtually adding insult to injury. In fact, it is hypocrisy. They take us for fools here, but we are not wearing dunce caps.

We are seeing here in the House that this abject behaviour is becoming a trend, an operating guideline for the Conservatives. They are playing hide-and-seek. Yet when this government was elected in 2006 it promised transparency and improved exercise of democracy to replace the former government, which, as we recall, was dealing with the sponsorship scandal, one of the biggest scandals in Canadian history. The Conservative government took over and, since it was elected in 2006, it has begun playing the same game of hypocrisy and lack of transparency, and I would even say using public funds for partisan purposes, as the Liberal Party had done previously.

The Conservatives are trying to undermine and subordinate this parliamentary institution with their dishonest arrogance. They claim they are not obliged to respond to Parliament about the costs of the bills, decisions or measures they put forward. They are not accountable to this Parliament. They are a minority government. Imagine what things would be like if this were a majority government. We would have a major scandal, probably as big as the one we had before, the sponsorship scandal.

The government is, in fact, obliged to provide certain information to Parliament, and the Speaker confirmed this yesterday in his decision. Parliament must be permitted to fill one of its fundamental roles. It is therefore time for hon. members to tell the Conservatives that enough is enough, and that is the motion tabled here by the Bloc. We are telling the Conservative government that enough is enough, and the government's lack of ethics and transparency has to stop. I believe that Quebeckers and Canadians deserve better.

• (1250)

The purpose of this motion is to denounce the Conservative government's failure to respect the rules of democracy and of Parliament.

Business of Supply

Many examples have occurred, and my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois and the other opposition parties have mentioned many of them. The time when the government refused to transmit documents to the committee is one example among many others. I could also talk about the case of the Minister of International Cooperation, who is accused of having falsified a document to refuse a grant to the KAIROS organization and then misleading Parliament when she was asked for explanations. Did she have a choice? I do not know. I do not think she was alone in doing what she did. It was based on Conservative ideology. However it has affected an important group, KAIROS, which unfortunately had a somewhat pro-Palestinian position. The government is one of the first Canadian governments to have proclaimed with conviction that it is somewhat pro-Israeli. As a result KAIROS did not receive a grant to carry out its humanitarian activities.

In his ruling yesterday, the Speaker confirmed that there is sufficient reason to conclude there is a prima facie question of privilege. Since this story came out, what has the Prime Minister done? He has approved, agreed with and defended his minister. He has failed to tell Canadians the whole truth and has refused to take full responsibility for her decision, trying to make Parliament think that public servants were somehow involved. The Prime Minister's behaviour is malicious. He has not said a word about the minister's lie or half-truths. What credibility can the Minister of International Cooperation still have with the NGOs and the many volunteers who manage humanitarian programs?

This too shows the government's and the Prime Minister's lack of respect for Parliament and the voters. Quebeckers and Canadians have a right to truth and transparency. The taxes they pay are managed by Parliament, and they have a right to know the figures. This is further proof that the Prime Minister thinks everything is permissible in his attempts to impose his aims. What arrogance, what contempt.

Let us look more closely at the whole issue of the Conservative Party's 2006 election expenses, which Elections Canada has deemed fraudulent. The Conservatives got elected by promising transparency and more ethical government. But even before they were elected, they were engaging in illegal activities. They now stand accused of illegalities by Elections Canada.

Just recently, the Federal Court of Appeal confirmed Elections Canada's view that the Conservatives violated the Canada Elections Act through their in and out financing system. That is what the Conservatives did before getting elected in 2006, and that is what the judgment clearly says. They intentionally transferred money from their national offices to have national advertising paid for by ridings and candidates who had not reached their spending limits, established by the Canada Elections Act, and were unlikely to do so.

• (1255)

In conclusion, the Speaker's two rulings yesterday have further tarnished not just the image of the Conservatives but everything they do. These people are brazen liars, who have nothing but contempt for the House of Commons, democracy and the people of Canada. That is why—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. Questions and comments.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Elections Canada scandal, which we have been debating the last few days, is all about the Conservative Party overspending its limits in the 2006 campaign. In fact, only the Conservative Party had the RCMP raid its office to gather documents. No other party was charged in this situation, because the Liberal Party, the Bloc and the New Democratic Party did not overspend. This was peculiar to the 2006 election.

Since then there has been one other election, the 2008 election. There were no charges emanating against any party in the House. Clearly even the Conservatives can learn from their mistakes.

Why are the Conservatives wasting court time? Why are they wasting their donor donations on lawyers, fighting what appears to be a lost cause? Why not admit that they were wrong at the time and move on? They would not be in the mess they are in right now if they did not keep denying, acting like Richard Nixon. It is just getting them into more trouble.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question.

The Conservatives' lack of integrity and transparency is astounding. Take, for example, their message to the Canadian and Quebec people that they do not want an election and that they would prefer to manage the economy. We know very well that they spent more than \$250 million to promote their economic action plan. They have also spent a great deal of money on pre-election advertising, and yet they continue to tell people that they do not want an election. That is a lack of transparency and integrity. I believe that the people deserve better. The people deserve a government that tells them the honest truth. That is not the case at present.

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Madam Speaker, we know how democracy works: rules are established so that, when an election is held, voters can choose their representatives in the House of Commons and, in the case of Quebec voters, in the National Assembly of Quebec. Election rules are necessary because without them there would be pandemonium; might would make right, and the winners would be the strongest or those with the most cronies. Therefore, rules must be established. The rules are voted on and enacted by this very Parliament. The members of the House, who vote on these laws, choose a referee. That referee is the Chief Electoral Officer, along with his team. In 2007, the referee, the Chief Electoral Officer, told the Conservative Party that it had made a mistake and would have to reimburse monies, and that it had contravened the law enacted by Parliament. Now the government is taking Elections Canada, the referee, to court.

What does my colleague think of this?

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate because this is an attack on the institutions that are there to ensure that elections are decent, fair and equitable for all candidates who are running and for all voters.

Business of Supply

What the Conservatives did is clear in the judgment. The Conservatives deliberately transferred money from the national level to pay a national advertising invoice in ridings where the candidates had not reached their spending limits or who had little chance of reaching their limits, as set out in the Canada Elections Act. A riding may raise money from donations it receives from the public in order to participate in a campaign. But the Conservatives did the opposite, which clearly and directly violates the Canada Elections Act. That is shameful and appalling. And now they are once again taking taxpayer money to sue Elections Canada, the same institution—

• (1300)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. The hon. member for Burlington.

[English]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my excellent colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

I want to start with the basics of why we are here today. This is a business of supply motion. For those who do not know the history or understand what happens, the governments of the day determined that for the estimates to go through in a smoother way, they would provide opposition benches a day to talk about the issues and policies that are important to them. If they want to get on the record something they are in favour of or want to do, they can use the time, as we are today, to criticize the government.

I worked very hard to get elected, as all members do. We come here to make a difference, to debate issues and policies, and the motions this week have had nothing to do with those issues. I am sad for the people who claim that we are here to work together. We hear that from opposition members on television all the time. In press conferences they say we should be working together to make this place work. We hear that all the time, but what kinds of motions do they bring forward? They bring forward partisan motions that have nothing to do with helping the economic or social well-being of Canadians.

I am willing to debate issues and policies that I may not agree with on the economic or social services sides, but the motions this week are a complete waste of taxpayers' money for our time and effort. What are members doing here?

This is a Bloc motion. On a supply day Bloc members are entitled to move any motion they wish. They have brought forward a motion to talk about the conduct of the government. I am very proud of the conduct. I can talk about it because it is mentioned in the Bloc's motion. However, let me talk about the conduct of the Bloc for a few minutes.

This is not personal. I have great respect for Bloc members I have met and dealt with in committee. They are very intelligent and engaged in the issues at committee. I admire their efforts in getting elected, but what are they doing for Canada and Canadians? I forgot: they do not even care about Canada. That is the basis upon which they were elected.

They go to the people in their ridings and say they are going to Ottawa to work on breaking up this country and they are allotted a day to debate a motion. They are entitled to it, but I do not

understand why Quebeckers continue to elect Bloc members. What have they done in terms of policy, social services or anything else in the last 20 years? For 20 years they have been here and I can only think of one accomplishment, which is that they keep being re-elected. They collect paycheques and will get pensions, but they have done nothing to move the yardstick on policy.

The other issue in this motion is about providing parliamentary committees with the cost of proposals. I would like to speak to this part of the motion. I sit on the Standing Committee on Finance and the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. There has been a plethora of Bloc private members' bills over the last number of years. How many of them have had costs? How many of those private members' bills have been researched to see if they are even legal, let alone financially sustainable? The answer is none, zero.

• (1305)

I have been at these committees and have asked the individual movers of those private members' bills to provide that information. They look around, they look at their staff and they do not have it. They have not done their homework.

People would expect that if one is going to change the laws for all of Canada, not just for Quebec or for a riding, that people would take the time and effort to get these items that are being brought forward at least priced out so that we would know if they are going to affect the taxpayers' pocketbook. We would know if they would have any effect from a social services perspective, but they do not do that work.

They go to the Library of Parliament and say that they want to make the sky blue. They get a bill sent to them saying that the sky is going to be blue. They present to the House what they want to accomplish, but there is nothing. I have proof of this with the bills that have been sent to me. I do not want to pick only on the Bloc because it happens in other parties, including my own.

These bills need to be vetted. I have sent them to the Parliamentary Budget Officer for review. The Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer would respond and say, "Well, based on these assumptions, we really cannot price it out. We are not sure where we are going with this".

In this motion, how can the Bloc members criticize the conduct of the government when they do not do it themselves? Time and time again they have brought these ill-thought-out bills to committee to be voted on in the House and they have not done their due diligence to find out what it would actually cost the taxpayers of all of Canada, including Quebec. I do not know why they have the audacity to put the refusal to a parliamentary committee to provide costs when they will not do it themselves.

Business of Supply

The other point I wish to comment on is the conduct of this government.

The economic action plan, year two, is the seventh report that we have put out on economic activity. Nobody in the House is denying that the world economy has been tough over the last couple of years. I have not heard anyone in the House say that. Canada is faring better than most other countries, including being number one in the G7. That is supported by the OECD and other commentaries around the world. We have quotes from British newspapers and from New York. I am not going to bother with a bunch of quotes because we all know it is true. We know that we are doing better.

What should the opposition be doing today on a supply day? If those members do not think we are doing good enough on the economic recovery, why do they not ask questions? Why are they not putting forward what they would do differently? Why are they not giving their voters a chance to see what they would do if they were able to form a government, which they will not? Why will they not admit that they are not interested in forming a government?

Bloc members may be interested in forming a coalition where they can have their say with the NDP and the Liberals. They may be interested in a coalition to see if they can get their way. They know they have no real responsibility because they have no accountability and are never going to form government. They are never going to put forward government legislation. It is not going to happen and they know that. So they put forward a motion that is a mixed bag of all these items, similar to what we had on Tuesday.

Are we making a difference for Canadians? Are we making sure that Canadians have jobs? Are we making sure that even though we are in recovery and the economy is still fragile, we are doing something?

Does the motion do anything to move the yardstick to make Canada, including Quebec, a better place in which to live? Does the motion do anything on the social policies of this country, whether it is providing services to individuals, children, adults and seniors? Are we doing anything in this motion? Are we spending a full day debating an issue that is going to make a difference in anyone's life in this country?

My answer is no. It is shameful that opposition parties can hold this government to account on issues, but to waste their supply day on issues that have nothing to do with helping Canadians is a waste of time and I am almost embarrassed to be up here speaking to it.

• (1310)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Madam Speaker, what we have just heard makes no sense. It would appear that democracy means nothing to the member opposite, that the meaning of honour and transparency, and being held accountable to the public and to parliamentarians, are of absolutely no value. It is unacceptable to hear that from a member of this House.

I have a very simple question for him. What is so difficult about being transparent and making documents available, particularly those related to Afghan prisoners or the documents the parliamentary budget officer needs to be able to understand the government's

figures? What is so difficult about producing these documents? I would like the member to explain.

[English]

Mr. Mike Wallace: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question because it is exactly my point. Members are asking why is it so difficult for our party. Every time they bring a private member's bill to committee it is never priced out. Then we send it to the Parliamentary Budget Officer and he says he does not understand what they are trying to get, that they are not providing enough information.

You want to be transparent. Tell your people that you are wasting Canadian taxpayers' time on motions like this and you will not do your work here. You be transparent—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I am sure the hon. member is not telling the Speaker that I am wasting time. I would ask that all questions be directed through the Speaker.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, that is a rather interesting position from the member. I sit on committee with him. The Minister of Industry has presented several bills to us and never costed out a single one of those bills. That has never been provided to our committee.

I would invite the member to table information for all those bills that he sat through all those times and have the actual report for us. Specifics would be important for us to have. It just does not happen.

What is important to know is that the people of Burlington, for example, have to pay more of their taxpayer money to the Conservative Party through the in and out situation.

The reality is that Elections Canada has investigated all parties. Elections Canada has determined that it was a requirement of the RCMP to charge four of the members of the member's political party. Then Conservatives sued Elections Canada and tried to get taxpayers' money back. The Conservatives are going to spend more taxpayer money for lawyers and for tying up the people who run our democratic institutions. Then they want a rebate on top of that. The Conservatives want the people of Burlington, and other ridings, to pay more money back to their political purse, despite the fact the RCMP has charged four of their party members in this matter.

It is important when we look at this in the overall perspective that we are not just talking about the money they received from the in and out scandal, but there is also the money they are trying to take for this position.

Why does the member believe that the people of Burlington should pay more for his party when the Conservatives broke the rules?

Mr. Mike Wallace: Madam Speaker, I have two answers to that question.

First, it will be interesting to see this afternoon whether the member comes to committee and talks about estimates. I have a lot of questions for the staff on the actual spending that is happening in that department. I will bet \$1 million that the member from the New Democratic Party will try to trap the minister on some sort of policy issue or will not talk about the actual spending, which is what happens all the time at committee.

Second—

• (1315)

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Is betting part of the parliamentary process?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Burlington.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Madam Speaker, that is the problem with days like today. Opposition members do not take them seriously.

We need to remind the House that on the issue with Elections Canada, we have taken it to court and we have won. It was appealed and we lost, but we are continuing that process.

We believe we did the right thing based on the interpretation of the law at the time. When that interpretation changed, we changed our practice. There is nothing wrong with what we have done.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, I fully agree with the hon. member. We are truly wasting our time here today. There is no question about that. The Bloc's motion is vague, far-fetched and totally false. Its premises are absolutely ludicrous. Unfortunately, it is not surprising to see the Bloc come up with such a silly motion.

That party is clearly trying to divert Quebecers' attention. The things that matter to Canadians and Quebecers are the economy and employment. Everything we have done over the past number of years has been aimed at improving the economy. Whenever the Bloc has had the opportunity to help Quebec families and businesses, it has always refused to do so.

I want to use my time to look at what our Conservative government has done for Quebec, and compare it to the Bloc Québécois' record of inaction, inefficiency and hypocrisy.

The Conservative government's top priority is growth, the economy and employment. Therefore, this is not the time to have a totally useless, opportunistic and costly election. Canadians expect us to focus on their priorities, and they certainly deserve so. That is why we are committed to tabling a budget later this month. The Bloc Québécois has already said it would vote against it, without having even read it, which is rather incredible. This budget will be the next phase of our economic action plan, which the Bloc has consistently opposed. It has essentially voted against all the investments that have been made in Quebec.

Of course, we totally reject the Bloc's motion. It is our government which introduced the Federal Accountability Act. Our government—as my colleague mentioned earlier—is extremely accountable. We are the ones who introduced and implemented this legislation. It goes without saying that we also comply with it.

Business of Supply

We are getting results for every part of Canada and every part of Quebec. In particular, we gave Quebec a seat at UNESCO. We recognized that the Québécois form a nation within Canada, which is not insignificant. The Bloc says those are empty words without substance, but that is not true. The substance accumulates gradually. These things grow and improve over time, but we need to make a start, and that is what we did.

We have supported the infrastructure priorities of our towns and cities. I used to be a mayor and can say that the respectful, tripartite co-operation among the provincial, federal and municipal levels of government has yielded absolutely exemplary results in all regions of Quebec.

We have celebrated the history and culture of Quebec and Quebec City, especially through our major contributions to the 400th anniversary of Quebec City. In the weeks and months to come, we will have a chance to celebrate the anniversaries of a number of Quebec towns, especially during the summer, which is a happening time in Quebec. Once again, we will play a role in these anniversaries.

In demanding more than \$16 billion in budgetary spending, as they recently did, the Bloc leader and his members have made themselves very clear. They are just looking for an excuse to reject the next federal budget and trigger elections, something neither Quebec nor Canada needs. That is all they really want, as they have shown on many occasions, especially over the last few weeks.

That is why the Bloc voted against the economic action plan twice, once in 2009 and once in 2010. It is totally unacceptable that members of Parliament elected by Quebecers to represent them vote on the aspects that are most beneficial to themselves, especially in our own regions. There is definitely something wrong about that.

We have also taken action since the beginning of the global economic crisis to stimulate job creation and reduce taxes for the middle class and seniors, to improve the employment insurance program, and to help our companies ride out the crisis. Our actions have produced results in all regions of Quebec. But every time they had the chance, the Bloc voted against these measures, including the ones on employment insurance, even though they claim to be its great defenders. It is absolutely incredible.

Even before the worldwide crisis hit our shores, our government was taking action to reduce the taxes on job creators. The Bloc leader noted that these tax reductions had helped to create jobs, but still he voted against them. He said they were good, but he voted against them. It is incomprehensible. They voted against tax relief in December 2007. That is further proof of the blatant opportunism and hypocrisy of that party.

• (1320)

The Bloc is not concerned about the priorities and values of Quebecers living outside the big cities, and in fact I am the proof of that. I come from a riding that was represented by the Bloc for 16 years, which produced absolutely nothing. If we look at the results achieved since I was elected, we see that it makes all the difference.

Business of Supply

The Bloc does not work for Quebecers outside the big cities. What it does is defend its own interests and a political ideology that produces absolutely nothing for Quebecers.

Given the motion presented today, allow me to repeat that the Bloc is trying to divert Quebecers' attention and is doing nothing, absolutely nothing, for Quebec. The Bloc members have done nothing and do not intend to do anything to help the economy. They have done nothing to create jobs in Quebec. They put the interests of criminals ahead of victims' interests. That is another example of the elements they stand up for. They blocked our government's efforts to make our streets safer and our communities more liveable. Here they sit in Ottawa, when in fact, 20 years ago, they said they would only be here for four years. Twenty years later, they are still here. We have to believe they have grown accustomed to their incomes and all the benefits, like the pensions when they leave office.

Quebeckers are not dupes. At least, the ones in my riding are not, that is for sure, because they decided that enough was enough.

The funny thing is that the Liberals and the NDP want to form a coalition. They already tried to do it, with a separatist, independentist party. When you think about it, it really is unbelievable. Ottawa is the national capital of Canada. There is a party that wants to separate Quebec from Canada and there are federalist parties that want to merge with it. It really is quite unbelievable. I imagine that in the next election, Canadians will remember that potential coalition. In fact, as we speak, those parties are again trying to create another one.

Debating this motion all day is a complete waste of time, and is pointless. It makes absolutely no sense to waste our time debating this question today. I sincerely believe that we can expect nothing from the Bloc Québécois, which has proved in the last 20 years that it is totally useless.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question. He maintains that the Bloc does nothing in the Canadian Parliament, that our party has no logic and no legitimacy. I will take myself as an example. This is the sixth time that the people of Saint-Jean have voted for me. Does the member consider that the 30,000 people of Saint-Jean who elected me and who represent 50% of the constituents of the riding are fools who vote for someone without logic or legitimacy? This is my question.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Madam Speaker, I would be very happy to answer my colleague's question.

In my riding, people elected a Bloc Québécois candidate for 16 years. I have the highest respect for my Bloc colleague's constituents and for the constituents of all our colleagues from the Bloc Québécois. Voters make a deliberate choice, which is theirs to make. However, when people understand that their choice is absolutely useless, they wake up. This is probably what is going to happen in most Bloc Québécois ridings in the next election.

[*English*]

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague's eloquent speech. I do have a question or two for the hon. member.

I have been here for just about two and a half years. In terms of the budget we put forward, the Bloc members voted against budget

items that would have helped the people in Quebec, particularly in the Bloc ridings. Are they being effective for their constituents?

The Bloc members seem to want more and more. They want the government to stay out of Quebec. They want more money. However, they do not support any part of the economic action plan, which has been very helpful to Canadians right across the country, in all regions, including Quebec and the Bloc ridings.

Could my colleague respond to that question?

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his excellent question.

The global recession we have experienced is, to the best of our knowledge, the worst economic crisis to hit the world since the 1930s. In relation to my colleague's question, I would say that Canada's economic action plan of the past two years was implemented regardless of political affiliations—who voted for whom and so on. Money was invested in all Quebec ridings in the most incredible way.

What is even more incredible is that members of the Bloc Québécois voted against initiatives aimed at increasing competitiveness and improving the quality of life in regions, which is the reason why they were elected to the House. But they voted against these initiatives.

I am trying to figure out what my reaction would be if I were a mayor or a citizen of the regions they represent. It must be really strange to see these elected representatives who are supposed to work for the best interests of their own neighbourhood, region or city vote against these measures. It is absolutely incredible. It is unacceptable.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to inform you, as I begin, that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

I have prepared a few notes, as is my habit when making a speech. I wondered what title I would use if I were to present a dissertation on the Conservative Party and democracy. I have decided to entitle my speech, "Conservative ideology is incompatible with democracy". I will have only 10 minutes to try to defend my point of view. I will give six examples.

I will start by saying that we must never take democracy for granted. We are supposedly in the shrine of democracy here, where parliamentarians can express themselves freely. But since the Conservative government came to power we have seen a rather draconian shift in the importance of democracy. The Conservative Party gives us daily examples of how it deliberately sidesteps democracy. As I was saying, I have six examples to give.

Business of Supply

First, let us talk about circumventing the rules on election spending limits. We have adopted certain rules in Canada, which are very different from those elsewhere in the world. I go regularly to the United States, where there are almost no rules. An American congressman is elected every two years. If he does not have \$1,000,000 in his account at the start of the election campaign, he is considered beaten. But who gives the congressman his \$1,000,000? Usually it is big corporations. This is an attack on democracy, because once the money has been received, and there is no ceiling there, people call and request favours. If someone has given us \$100,000 or \$200,000, it is hard to say no.

Here, we have established a different system, and it is important. We cannot spend more than so much for a party and for a candidate. When ways of circumventing that are found, that is an attack on democracy. That is precisely what the Conservative Party did with its scheme, its sleight-of-hand, in sending money from the national party to certain constituencies, which was then sent back to the national party. This scheme allowed the Conservative Party to spend \$1.3 million more than the maximum permitted. That is playing with the rules of democracy, and it is unacceptable.

Now, I would like to talk about the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, who, using the property and services of Canadian taxpayers, sent a letter on his own letterhead to immigrant groups to ask them to contribute and be generous with the Conservatives. Who does he think he is, the pope of immigration? Does it mean that without him, you could be excommunicated? It is as though he has the last word on immigration. As though the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP have no say on immigration. This kind of racial profiling is dangerous, because the minister knows full well it can have an impact on these groups. And for them, he is a sort of authority. Not only did he use his own letterhead, but he also used his office: his staff, paid for by taxpayers, participated in the operation. That is another attack on democracy. When a minister blurs the line between his role as a member of the party and his government duties, it becomes dangerous for democracy. The minister has been criticized, and he should understand that when he is caught doing something like that, he should not make an assistant take the blame. He has ministerial responsibility. He must take responsibility and hand in his resignation to the Prime Minister.

Now, I would like to talk about a minister who alters documents. We have the minister responsible for CIDA, who signed a document granting the funding requested by KAIROS, and who then, a few days later, had the word “not” added. This word was written in by hand on the letter. It is very clear to us that the minister signed the letter to grant funding.

• (1330)

Then, probably under pressure from the Prime Minister, she wrote “not” on the document, or someone close to her did. Once again, it is a matter of ministerial responsibility. This is an example of how they play with democracy.

First they say they will give the money, then they say the opposite. On top of that, they come out with all kinds of theories, all very confusing, to defend themselves, so confusing in fact, I would remind the government, that the Speaker of the House issued a ruling

yesterday that said it is impossible to do that and that it does not work.

They are trying to mislead the House. In particular, they are trying to mislead members of the opposition. In a democracy, how are we supposed to do our job if the government is always trying to hide things from us and mislead us?

This minister should also tender her resignation to the Prime Minister, but she refuses to do so. She is sticking to her guns and others have come to her defence. Every so often, regarding issues that have nothing to do with her case, she stands up to reply, to try to restore her reputation, but if you ask me, her reputation is beyond saving.

Let us turn our attention to the federal government that must now call itself the Prime Minister's government. That is a good one. Louis XIV said “I am the state”. The Prime Minister is saying “I am the government”. That might fly with Conservative backbenchers, but for the opposition, that is definitely unacceptable. Who does he think he is, this Prime Minister? A monarch? A king?

I would remind the House that although “monarchy” and “democracy” nearly rhyme, a monarchy is the antithesis of democracy. In a monarchy, a group of courtiers surround the king, and the people have no say. The Prime Minister must not think that such behaviour will be accepted. In my dissertation entitled “Conservative ideology is incompatible with democracy”, those are some examples.

While we are dealing with the costs of the proposed measures, perhaps I should talk about the Afghan detainees issue, because I sit on the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan. We spent months asking for the documents, but the government refused to provide them on the ground that they included state secrets. Later, the law clerk of the House conducted studies and said that if the House of Commons is to fully assume its democratic role, the opposition must do its work. However, if the opposition is not allowed to do its work, there is a problem on the legislative side. That view was expressed by Mr. Walsh, the law clerk.

So, we kept pressing the issue and we eventually compelled the Speaker of the House to make a landmark ruling. Moreover, yesterday, the Speaker also ruled on the minister's behaviour and on the documents that are required to estimate costs and to determine whether the budget is sound. There again, the Conservatives got caught by the Speaker of the House of Commons regarding democratic issues.

The king, who sits to the right in front of me during question period, decided, on the issue of Afghan detainees, in seigneurial and royal fashion, to suspend our proceedings, to prorogue the House and to tell us to go home, this in the midst of an economic crisis. And we had to be content with that.

Incidentally, in the days and weeks that followed, the polls reflected the undemocratic decision made by this government. We are not a monarchy. We are a democracy, and the Conservative government must realize that.

Business of Supply

The last example is the one to which I just referred. Indeed, opposition members are asking for studies that support the political choices that are going to be made in the budget. How much do prisons cost? Why is the amount set at \$30 billion? How much will the F-35 cost? How does the government come up with that figure?

Finally, since I only have 15 seconds left, I am going to repeat the title of my essay, namely that the Conservative ideology is incompatible with parliamentary democracy.

• (1335)

Again, the title of my essay is “Conservative ideology is incompatible with parliamentary democracy”.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Madam Speaker, could my Bloc Québécois colleague explain to me why Conservative members claim in this House that members of the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP did the same things they did?

Why did the Royal Canadian Mounted Police raid only the Conservatives’ headquarters? Why were the Conservatives the only ones who faced criminal charges?

Mr. Claude Bachand: Madam Speaker, I want to sincerely thank my NDP colleague for his question, for this is a part of my remarks I forgot to read, and he is giving me the opportunity to do it.

The answer is easy. When complaints were filed, the RCMP and Elections Canada raided the Conservative Party headquarters. And now, the Conservatives would have us believe it is just a minor administrative issue. If the RCMP came into my place, at 439 Casavant Street in Saint-Jean, with its cavalry and Elections Canada to search the premises, and if I was charged afterwards, I would hardly be in a position to try to convince my neighbours it was just a minor administrative mistake. This is not what you would call a daily occurrence.

If the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP are not in the same situation, it is because Elections Canada does not think there is any problem. We are not the ones being targeted. It is the Conservative Party’s headquarters that was searched and it is the Conservative Party that was charged. The latest development is that the Federal Court has just ruled that Elections Canada and the RCMP were right. I hope this will end up before the Supreme Court of Canada. If it does, Louis XIV will probably proclaim that he is the government, he is the state and he will not bow to the Supreme Court of Canada. I can hardly wait for his reaction.

• (1340)

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, first, I want to congratulate my colleague from Saint-Jean for an excellent speech that was very clear and specific. He talked about something that is important to me. There were several schemes aimed at hiding documents relating to torture in Afghanistan. Moreover, we want to know about major costs associated with prisons, but we cannot get them. We want to know the cost of the new fighter jets—this is an issue my colleague is following closely—but we cannot get anything. I would like to know what the member thinks of these issues.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Madam Speaker, my colleague has focused on some points I touched upon in my comments. It is true it was extremely difficult to find a compromise with the government

on the issue of Afghan prisoners. I want to congratulate my colleague who sits on the committee. The Bloc Québécois signed the agreement but is now thinking that if the government does not deal with this matter before April 15, it is going to withdraw from the agreement. That would be perfectly normal. We have been waiting for these documents for eight months. What is happening? I cannot ask any questions of my colleague who, as everyone knows, cannot say anything about this matter. Perhaps I could ask the judges why there is no progress. I know the committee is working diligently and I trust my colleagues. This is another example of the secrecy and the lack of transparency of this government.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the election scandal of 2006 involved only one party being raided by the RCMP and being charged. No offences were committed by the Bloc, the NDP or the Liberal Party. And, guess what? It all stopped in 2006 because by the 2008 election even the Conservatives knew it was wrong and they did not do it again.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Madam Speaker, I repeat that the searches and accusations were focused on the Conservative Party and not at the other parties. I do not want the Conservatives to say that we did the same thing. Had that been the case, they would have formally complained long ago, but they did not. They knew that it was done legally on this side of the House and illegally on the other side.

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Madam Speaker, the current Conservative government is hands down the most undemocratic government we have ever seen in Ottawa. Personally, I have been a member of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics since 2008, and I have lost track of how many files have been submitted to this committee concerning undemocratic behaviour by Conservative government members.

The Bloc Québécois felt it was important to present the motion we are discussing in the House today because the Bloc is the vigilant party here in Ottawa. Since it arrived on the federal scene, the Bloc has never looked back and it has been committed to keeping watch over the federal government, no matter which party is in power.

In its day, the sponsorship scandal was the most significant breach of the rules of democracy that the Bloc had ever uncovered on Parliament Hill. Today the Liberals may be outraged and cry foul about the Conservative Party’s undemocratic behaviour, but no one has forgotten that the Gomery commission proved that for years the Liberal Party of Canada also successfully trampled the basic rules of democracy to ensure that it remained in power in Ottawa.

The day after their minority government was elected in January 2006, the Conservatives wrapped themselves in a cloak of integrity and transparency. We had hoped that they had learned a lesson and would keep their promises, but it was all just smoke and mirrors. In fact, over the past five years, this minority government has continued to develop slick schemes, each more unacceptable than the last, to ensure that it would keep control of power and act as though it were a majority. This government rivals the Liberals in the art of misleading parliamentarians and the people they represent.

Business of Supply

The Bloc Québécois is presenting this motion today simply because it believes there is an urgent need to unmask the Conservatives' undemocratic behaviour and denounce them loud and clear in this Parliament, which is the most tangible symbol of democracy in our society.

In our parliamentary system, Parliament is the ultimate representation of democracy, freely expressed during an official election. The government that takes office must serve Parliament and the public and ensure that all elected members can fully represent their constituents. We are dealing with a minority government that, since taking office in January 2006, has been playing hide-and-seek with Parliament and constantly tries to obstruct Parliament's rules. This attitude weakens democracy, provokes crises that breed cynicism and destroys the average citizen's trust in politicians.

The Bloc Québécois has always been committed to fighting against any attacks on democratic institutions, any abuse of power by the government, any affront to the autonomy of independent institutions, any undue restrictions on access to information, and any hindrance preventing elected representatives of the people from fully representing their constituents.

Since January 2006, there has been overwhelming evidence to show that the Conservative Party does not want to abide by democratic rules. Allow me to name just a few instances of that: prorogation of Parliament on two occasions despite the wishes of the majority of the elected representatives; control over information delivered to the media on the decisions and activities of Parliament; the in and out process used during the 2005-06 election campaign to establish a national ad campaign paid for by local candidates, a process deemed illegal by Elections Canada; boycotting of certain parliamentary committees, specifically the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, on which I sit, through multiple absences, refusals to provide required documents and filibusters to block the work of the committee; the control by the Privy Council Office over sensitive access to information requests addressed to the government, an attitude we also see in the departments. For example, an employee at the Department of Public Works ordered officials to unduly delay publication of documents that were comprising to the government.

Let us not forget the scandalous imposition, by the Prime Minister, of a directive to his employees and employees of all ministers prohibiting them from appearing before parliamentary committees, specifically the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, which was investigating the control exerted by the offices of Conservative ministers over access to information requests.

•(1345)

With regard to controlling access to information requests, the Information Commissioner is currently conducting a formal investigation of three ministers, and we are still waiting for the results.

All these facts clearly show that the people can no longer trust the Conservatives to restore access to information. The Conservative government demonstrated the extent of its culture of secrecy during the last parliamentary session, when the Speaker of the House had to

demand that it produce the documents on allegations of torture in Afghanistan.

The most recent misstep in terms of respect for democratic rules was made by the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, who showed a clear lack of judgment as the person responsible for immigration in Canada. As a number of my colleagues have already pointed out, he participated in a partisan activity involving cultural communities and newcomers, even though he is responsible for ensuring that everyone is treated equally. He acted more like a Conservative minister of propaganda for ethnocultural communities. That is the true nature of this Conservative government, which claims to be transparent and responsible. It is a government of propaganda that has proven to be very good at manipulating information and voters.

Being ethical and transparent is a question of will. No rule can take the place of political will and vigilance. The best example to date of the excesses of Conservative propaganda is the unbelievable directive that was sent to public servants late last year stating that, in federal communications, the words "Government of Canada" should be replaced by the Prime Minister's name followed by Government. The directive was from the Prime Minister's office.

We checked and found that, since December, the expression "Name That Cannot Be Said In The House Government" has spread like wildfire in public departmental communications. You practically do not see "Government of Canada" any more. But the "Name-that cannot be said-in-the-House Government" now oversees us. Must we all be transformed into Harry Potter to defeat He Who Must Not Be Named? Stay tuned.

This directive turns out to be the best piece of political propaganda from the Conservative Government of Canada. Today, the Bloc Québécois wishes to warn citizens and have them truly understand the dangerous drift that has threatened our democracy since the Conservatives came to power in Ottawa.

Imagine if this Conservative government won a majority in the next election. I cannot envisage it without shuddering. Action is urgently needed. Our democracy is in jeopardy.

Come next election time, Quebecers will know that they can no longer count on the government of the person who I cannot name in the House if I wish to abide by the essential rules of any effective democracy.

•(1350)

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, there was a lot of torqued up and over-the-top language in the member's comments. There was also quite a bit of revisionist history.

I served on the committee to which the member referred. We heard from quite a number of witnesses. In the summer of 2008 the committee heard a lot of evidence about how the Bloc Québécois transferred money from the central party into the ridings and back to the party. From the best we can see, the leader of the Bloc Québécois is the first person to have used this method. He was in fact referred to as the creator, or the father, of the transfer from the main party to the association and then back to the party.

Business of Supply

Perhaps the member could comment on whether she or any of her colleagues have ever used the technique designed by her leader?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question and for the information he provided. Before answering, I would like to also thank the NDP members here today who spoke so loudly during my speech that I had a hard time hearing myself. I would like to thank them for listening; it was very kind. Madam Speaker, it would have been kind of you to call the members to order.

I will now respond to the very interesting question about in and out schemes and the fact that the Bloc Québécois was the creator of such schemes. I would like to remind the hon. member of the Conservative Party that, had the Bloc Québécois been guilty of wrongdoing of this sort, the Conservatives would have been the first to complain and to send the RCMP to investigate and check all of our ridings' books. That did not happen. The only party that was investigated, that had its books checked and that was charged in a case that was brought before the Federal Court and the Federal Court of Appeal is the Conservative Party and no other.

The bottom line is that, despite the fact that they have been abusing democracy for many years, they are no longer even capable of admitting their mistakes, which are now recognized by the courts.

I do not know if they will have the gall to take this as far as the Supreme Court at the public's expense, but it is shameful to circumvent the most fundamental democratic rules of a parliamentary system in such a manner. Circumventing the electoral laws to divert money for unnecessary advertising is a crime. If another party had behaved in such a manner, rest assured that it would have already been subject to a search. The Conservatives are the only guilty ones and they must take the blame.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her speech. The Conservative government has made a habit of resorting to this culture of secrecy by refusing to provide information, or by providing it in very small doses. Now, it is democracy that is being impaired. It is really disturbing to hear that public servants were told to replace "Government of Canada" in public announcements with the Prime Minister's name followed by the word "Government". Louis XIV used to say "I am the State". The Prime Minister also thinks he is the State.

What does my colleague have to say about this autocratic, centralizing and undemocratic government?

• (1355)

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Madam Speaker, the expression "I am the State" says it all. We are no longer in the British parliamentary system as we know it. We have become a kind of royalty. Someone suddenly decided here that he would be a king. We must call to order all elected members, and particularly Conservative members, and remind them that we are in a democratic parliamentary system. All elected members have the right to speak, particularly in a minority government. The Conservatives should recognize their status and they should work with their fellow members in a diligent and proactive fashion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie may begin her remarks, but I will have to interrupt her at 2 p.m.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the hon. member for Joliette, who sponsored today's motion. I am going to preface my remarks with a proverb from my country of origin. It says that a fish dies through the mouth, and this government is clear proof of that. After promising so much about transparency and accountability, it has ended up taking the bait.

Over the past 24 hours, we have witnessed a remarkable series of events, and it is very appropriate to debate this motion today. We cannot help but notice this increasingly obvious pattern on the part of the Conservative government, which is to ignore the will of Parliament and, particularly, to ignore the best interests of Canadians. We see a government that is not governing but keeping us in a permanent election mode.

We also see a government that is prepared to sacrifice political assistants and public servants while claiming to bring accountability. This has to be a dismal failure for a political party that campaigned by swearing that accountability was the most important thing for any elected member of this country. We have before us a government which, in marked contradiction with that commitment, is consumed by power, is imposing a monitoring regime and is manipulating the truth shamelessly.

Let us come back to the facts, nothing but the facts, by looking at 10 recent situations involving abuses of power by the Conservative regime.

First, there was the refusal to disclose the costs related to tax cuts, megaprison and the F-35s.

Next, the Conservative regime was unable to respect the majority motion of the House of Commons that asked it to provide, by March 7, all the details concerning its plans to spend billions of dollars on tax cuts for businesses, prison expansions and untended stealth jet fighters. Hiding these costs undermines the credibility of the whole budget. We must get answers to these questions before the budget is tabled. The member for Kings—Hants sent the question to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and asked that it report to the House before the budget is tabled.

Third, there were in and out schemes during elections. The Prime Minister's inner circle is accused of a \$1.2 million scheme for exceeding the allowed election spending limits and buying more advertising. High-ranking Conservative operators "transferred" money to local campaigns, money that was then "returned" to them. Now, they are facing serious accusations that could lead to imprisonment. When the candidates claimed the transfers to get \$800,000 more in repayments from the taxpayers, Elections Canada said, "Enough!"

Fourth, we had the decree by the "H" government to the public service. The Prime Minister is using public resources for partisan causes by forcing employees of the federal public service to replace the words "Government of Canada" with "the H Government". Canadians know that it is not the Prime Minister's government. The government belongs to all Canadians.

Statements by Members

Fifth, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism's "very ethnic" fundraising letter—

• (1400)

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the honourable member, but it is now 2:00 p.m., and we need to move on to statements by members. The member will have 16 minutes to continue her remarks later this afternoon.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S WEEK

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with this year's International Women's Week, we are proud to recognize women and girls who continue to achieve economic, social and democratic progress in Canada.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the women in the riding of Miramichi, to those who have paved the way for all of us and, most certainly, those special women who are well over 100 years old, and my riding has been blessed with a few.

Sadly, last month Muriel Morris passed away in her 104th year. Here is what her obituary read:

Her joy, kindness and dignity in dealing with wins, losses, set-backs and challenges was a trait that impressed all who knew her and a legacy passed to those who loved her.

Muriel Morris has made an indelible imprint on all of us. She will live on in every act of kindness, grace and dignity. Her memories and stories will enrich our lives long after she has passed.

* * *

PICKERING

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in March 1811, at Thompson's Tavern in Brougham, the first meeting of the township of Pickering was held and a new municipality born.

Two hundred years later, the now city of Pickering is kicking off its bicentennial year.

Born on Rougemount Drive, I have watched our small suburb grow into a booming community 100,000 strong. Now among the most diverse in Canada, it has one of the highest percentages of young families in the nation.

Pickering is rich not only in its diversity of people but also in its landscape. From large tracts of prime agricultural land to historic hamlets, like Brougham, Whitevale, Cherrywood, Greenwood and Claremont, Pickering has retained its small town character and heritage even as it expands.

In this bicentennial year, I call upon the government to finally respect and celebrate our history rather than tear it down, to recognize heritage structures on federal land, invest in them and stop their neglect and destruction. Two hundred years of history deserves no less.

I congratulate Mayor Ryan and members of council on an exciting year of celebrations ahead and wish them a happy bicentennial.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN JEWISH CONGRESS

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in March 1919, over 200 delegates elected by some 25,000 Jews met in Montreal, at the Monument-National, headquarters for the St-Jean-Baptiste Society of Quebec, to participate in the first assembly of the Jewish community in Canada.

This great democratic assembly led to the creation of the Canadian Jewish Congress, an organization that has played an important role in the fight for equality, civil rights, human rights and immigration policy reform in this country. The congress remains an important mouthpiece for the Jewish community, on both the national and international levels.

The goal of the Jewish Congress is to protect and improve the lives of Jews in Quebec, Canada and abroad. As part of its mandate, the organization helps develop an environment of mutual respect that fosters interfaith and cross-cultural dialogue. I should point out that in 2009, the Canadian Jewish Congress changed its name in Quebec to become the Quebec Jewish Congress.

Long live both of these organizations.

* * *

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, usually we would celebrate International Day of La Francophonie on March 20. Unfortunately, the Canadian Francophonie does not have a lot to celebrate.

Since it came to power, the Conservative government has been determined to restructure our public service. And it is doing so without any concern for the impact these changes will have on official language communities. The Conservative government has wreaked havoc on Service Canada and is leading us in the wrong direction.

How can the Conservative government designate the Atlantic administrative region as unilingual when it includes the only officially bilingual province in Canada and when more than 450,000 people in Atlantic Canada speak French?

We see the Conservatives blocking Bill C-232 in the Senate. Yet it was democratically passed by the elected representatives in Parliament. The Conservatives are against the idea of bilingual Supreme Court justices, which means that the communities are being denied fairer treatment.

Language rights must be protected and respected, period.

I would like to thank the francophone and anglophone organizations that fight to ensure that the official languages are respected.

Statements by Members

● (1405)

[English]

CITIZEN AWARDS

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to two outstanding citizens in my riding, Tamara Miyanaga of Taber and Alexandra Wilson of Brooks.

Tamara was named 2010 Taber Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year. She serves as a member of both the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Taber Food Bank Society.

Tamara was instrumental in the organization of Taber's Olympic Torch Relay event that brought people from our region together to celebrate the Olympic spirit and support of our Canadian athletes.

Alexandra Wilson is one of the two winners of the Historical-Dominion Institute's Canadian Citizenship Challenge. Alex took the challenge at St. Joseph's Collegiate in Brooks as part of a class project. She received a perfect score after studying the history and applying the values of our government's *Discover Canada* study guide. For her efforts, Alex won a trip to Ottawa to tour Parliament where I was pleased to meet and congratulate her.

I congratulate both Tamara and Alex on their well-deserved awards. Both of these individuals embody the civic spirit that continues to make the Medicine Hat constituency a great place to live.

* * *

EGYPT

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Egypt attempts to restore stability and affirm its commitments to democratic reform and religious freedoms, there are forces at work within the nation that view this time of transition as an opportunity to fan the flames of intolerance, persecution and sectarian violence.

What began on Saturday, March 5, when a mob of nearly 4,000 attacked the homes of Coptic Christians and razed the Church of St. Mina and St. George just 30 kilometres south of Cairo, has now claimed 13 lives as violence continues in the city. Most troubling is that the police and the armed forces, who have done so much to keep the peace and protect the innocent throughout Egypt, were reported as standing by, letting the violence against Christians occur unchecked.

I call on our Prime Minister and the government to speak out and to work through all our diplomatic channels to demand that safety and security be restored for all Egyptians immediately.

For the lives of loved ones, friends and family of Coptic Christians here in Canada and, indeed, for all Canadians, we must act now.

* * *

ANTI-SEMITISM

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the night of March 4, a school in my riding of Richmond, Gilmore Elementary School, was vandalized with racist graffiti. The graffiti included anti-

Semitic symbols and racist phrases. I find this deeply disturbing and troubling.

The RCMP has been quick to begin investigating this matter. The actions of those responsible for this disgusting crime cannot be tolerated in Richmond or anywhere in Canada.

Canada enjoys a harmonious society that embraces diversity. Those who seek to disrupt the multicultural nature of our society through bigotry and intolerance must be denounced.

I stand today in solidarity for our Jewish community and all those who are affected by the racist and anti-Semitic actions of these cowardly individuals.

* * *

[Translation]

TIBET

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to say that I participated today in the commemoration of the 52nd anniversary of the uprising of the Tibetan people in Lhasa, organized by the association Students for a Free Tibet. Those events in Lhasa were followed by China's repressive measures, forcing the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and political leader of Tibetans, to seek exile in India. According to the Tibetan government in exile, these events resulted in the deaths of 87,000 Tibetans who were victims of their religious convictions and their national pride.

For 52 years now, Tibet has tried unsuccessfully to regain some measure of autonomy. The cultural fabric of the "roof of the world" is weakening. Tibet's history books have been rewritten and the Tibetan language is no longer taught in secondary schools.

It is time to adopt a comprehensive approach that takes into account the interests of all parties involved, rather than taking one side or the other, so that Tibet may achieve real autonomy within China, as requested by the Dalai Lama.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

ISRAELI APARTHEID WEEK

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week, some Canadian universities are taking part in what is shamefully called Israeli Apartheid Week.

An editorial in *The Prince Arthur Herald* recently put it this way:

In Israel, all citizens, 20% of whom are Arab, vote in elections, participate in government and serve in the army—opportunities that were not afforded to non-whites in South Africa under apartheid.

Israel is not above criticism. As a pluralistic, democratic state, there is abundant legitimate criticism and debate, both domestically and abroad.

This year, some students launched their own Israel peace week, drawing attention to Israel's peace efforts and to the state's commitment to democracy and human rights, and to Israel's remarkable record of innovation and accomplishment, despite persistent threats to its existence from determined antagonists.

Statements by Members

There are multiple and vexing challenges to bringing about a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. [English]

If the end is to promote peace, university and civil agencies must embrace respectful debate and active listening, as opposed to heated, hurtful and distorted rhetoric.

* * *

CANADIAN JEWISH CONGRESS

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a former president of the Canadian Jewish Congress, I am delighted to pay tribute to one of the oldest and most distinguished of human rights NGOs, founded in March 1919 as the “Parliament of Canadian Jewry”. Its founding charter was inspired by a vision of equality and emancipation for Canadian and world Jewry, and indeed for all peoples and minorities, including a national homeland for the Jewish people.

Inspired later by Holocaust survivors, it fought against racism and anti-Semitism, for Holocaust remembrance and human rights, and for social justice and immigration reform.

[Translation]

The congress has been an ardent defender of bilingualism, the rights of minorities, multiculturalism and constitutionalism.

[English]

It played a historic role in the adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, while its vision of a human rights foreign policy found expression in its heroic role in the struggle for Soviet Jewry, one of the great human rights movements of the second half of the 20th century.

Mr. Speaker, through you, I say to the Congress, *kol hakavod* and félicitations.

* * *

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, members of the government have said repeatedly that our government does not want an unnecessary election. We want to focus on the economy. We want Canadians to keep their jobs and we want the fruits of their labour to stay in their pockets.

Our government believes that the opposition is being unethical by refusing to at least look at the budget. I am certain that many Canadians, including the people of my riding of Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, think it is unreasonable that the opposition refuses to wait and see what is in the budget before deciding how to vote on it.

If the trend continues, the Bloc will do what it does best: vote against the interests of Quebecers. The Liberal leader, with all his deep-thinking ideas, has also decided to vote against it.

Our government still believes that working together for our country is the best way to defend the interests of Quebecers and Canadians.

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader is looking for an excuse for an election as he thinks now is his last chance to become Prime Minister.

He is flinging baseless rumours and innuendo to justify the opportunistic election he so desperately wants. Unfortunately for him, examples of Liberal hypocrisy are everywhere.

Will he launch an investigation into the ethical breaches plaguing his own caucus, or is his feigned moral outrage just a shallow attempt to run from the economy and hide from the budget that is less than two weeks away?

Our government is focused on what really matters, jobs and the economy. Now, as the economy recovers, we remain on track, keeping taxes low and fighting coalition plans to hike taxes and kill jobs.

The Liberal leader's \$6 billion tax hike and increases to EI premiums are the wrong plan.

Our plan is to create jobs, continue the recovery, and improve the financial security for Canadian families, but the Liberals are determined to undo that good work.

* * *

CANADIAN JEWISH CONGRESS

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to assist in commemorating the achievements of the Canadian Jewish Congress and to remind this House of the determining role the Jewish community in Canada has played in our society.

[Translation]

The history of Canada's Jewish community began 250 years ago. This community fought to build a place for itself: from the election of Ezekiel Hart to the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada in 1807 and his subsequent expulsion, through the law sponsored by Louis-Joseph Papineau in 1831 granting full equivalent political rights to Jews, to the election in 1872 of Henry Nathan Jr., the first Jewish member of the House of Commons.

In 1919, it was time to begin turning the idea of uniting the entire community into a reality.

● (1415)

[English]

The CJC has participated in all aspects of Canadian life since that time, and provided crucial input into Canadian policy-making on education, religious freedoms and other human rights issues.

I join my colleagues in congratulating the Canadian Jewish Congress and wishing the congress many more years of formidable participation in Canadian life.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

QUEBEC'S ANGLOPHONE MINORITY

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to a Senate report, the federal government is not fulfilling its responsibility to protect the rights of Quebec's anglophone minority who claim that there are disparities in access to service and in its participation in collective decision making.

Nevertheless, Quebec is internationally known for the guarantees and protection it offers to this community. In fact, passing Bill 101 in Quebec made it possible to confirm that the common public language is French and thus ensure that the rights of the anglophone minority will always be respected and protected. Anglophones are an integral part of the Quebec nation. According to the Political Affairs Committee of the Council of Europe, “[t]he anglophone minority in Quebec [is] an excellent example of protection of rights of a linguistic minority.”

Unfortunately, we cannot say the same thing about the guarantees made to Acadians and Franco-Canadians. Senators are clearly out of touch with reality.

* * *

CONDUCT OF THE GOVERNMENT

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, two rulings on contempt shed light on the attacks by the Harper government against democracy. This is an unprecedented situation in which a government has been found guilty of contempt of Parliament three times in one year. The Conservative government is acting as though it were above the law and the rules.

Now we know why the Conservatives hid the real cost of the F-35s from Parliament and in the same breath duped Canadians: because these planes will cost the unacceptable sum of \$30 billion and not the \$16 billion they had previously stated.

Their stubbornness in refusing to issue a call for tenders for the procurement of fighter jets does not reflect the values or priorities of Canadians.

[English]

The Speaker's rulings are clear. The Conservatives have abused their power. They still have not disclosed information vital to the credibility of the budget. They still have not fired the minister who misled Parliament. They still have not repaid Canadians the stolen money from the in and out scam. They still have not removed people in the Prime Minister's inner circle from positions of power even though they face jail time.

Canadians are seeing this regime for what it really is.

* * *

CANADIAN JEWISH CONGRESS

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday the Minister of the Environment will be in Montreal to unveil a plaque commemorating the founding of the Canadian Jewish Congress. The plaque reads as follows:

In March 1919, more than 200 delegates elected by an estimated 25,000 Jews from across Canada met here at the Monument-National to participate in the first pan-Canadian Jewish assembly. This democratic exercise marked the birth of the Canadian Jewish Congress, an organization that was at the forefront of the struggle for equality, civil and human rights, and immigration reform in this country. Regarded by many as the “Parliament of Canadian Jewry”, the Congress continues to provide a voice for the Canadian Jewish community both nationally and internationally.

The Canadian Jewish Congress has also been a strong and consistent voice and advocate for the civil rights of individuals from all races and religions.

I congratulate the congress on this important milestone.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, your rulings yesterday should not have been necessary. A decent government would have complied with the rules of democracy without being forced to, but this is not a decent government. This is not the first time, not the second time, but the third time the government has been forced to respect the rulings and orders of the House. Now the game is up.

If the government actually respects the rulings of the Speaker, will it deliver the documents to the House and will it fire that minister?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have tremendous respect for you, your office and your ruling yesterday.

We had considered the information that we had provided to the House and believed that it responded in substance to the request that had been made by the House. Let me assure you, Mr. Speaker, that we will make every effort to comply with your ruling. That is our commitment.

• (1420)

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every effort is not good enough. The House order is clear. This is a question of compliance. It is not a matter of discretion.

[Translation]

This government has violated the basic rules of democracy in this House three times. But this is the moment of truth.

Will the government produce the documents, all of them, and fire that minister?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear that we will comply. We are working on that right now.

What is absolutely shocking is that the leader of the Liberal Party is trying to distract Canadians from their priorities. Everywhere I go in my own riding and right across Canada, Canadians are concerned about jobs. They are concerned about the economy. They are concerned about themselves and the future of their families. All we have from the Liberals are these distractions.

Oral Questions

We are going to stay focused on jobs. We are going to stay focused on the Canadian economy, even if the Liberals do not want us to.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can barely believe it. Does the government believe that Canadian democracy is a distraction?

Mr. Speaker, yesterday you ruled that the government has to tell Canadians the truth about the real cost of the stealth fighter aircraft. The Conservative government has offered us a guesstimate of \$16 billion. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said it is going to be just about double that at \$30 billion. That is \$1,000 for every Canadian man, woman and child.

When will the government stop lowballing the cost to the Canadian public, face the facts and tell them the truth?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no denying that the new jet fighters that our air force so desperately needs to replace the CF-18s, which will be 40 years old, will have a price.

Let me say this. The men and women in the Canadian armed forces are prepared to pay the ultimate price. They are prepared to sacrifice. They are brave. What do they count on? They count on the government to provide them with the tools they need. If that means it is going to be \$50 a year, or \$1 a week, to provide for Canadian sovereignty and to give our men and women the tools they need to do the job, it is a price that we are prepared to pay.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can tell him the price: \$30 billion. That is what the Conservative fighter jets will cost. It makes no sense.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has confirmed our fears: the Conservatives were hiding the truth from Canadians. Thirty billion dollars is double what the Conservatives were telling us. Thirty billion dollars is as much as the federal government transfers to the provinces for health care. No wonder they wanted to hide the real cost.

Are they telling us that 65 fighter jets are just as important as every doctor, hospital and nurse in Canada?

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government can balance priorities. We can fund health care with more money than any government in the history of the country to protect Canadians' health. We can also fund the equipment that our men and women in uniform need to protect Canadian sovereignty at home and to protect our values abroad. In fact, our experts stand by their estimates and stand by the projections.

We have committed \$9 billion for the purchase of 65 aircraft, \$250 million or \$300 million a year over 20 years for the in-service support.

We thank Mr. Page for his report. It was a "preliminary set of data for discussion". He admitted the F-35 is the only jet that meets the needs of the air force. We should listen to him.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is too bad the Conservatives cannot fund our veterans properly. That \$30 billion is an obscene amount of money. It makes a person's head spin.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has confirmed our fears. The Conservative fighter jets are really going to cost double what the Conservatives have been telling us. The amount of \$30 billion is how much money the Government of Canada transfers to provinces for health care. No wonder the Conservatives continue to hide the real cost.

Do Conservatives seriously believe that 65 stealth fighters are as important to Canadians as every doctor, nurse and hospital in our country?

• (1425)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my loud colleague is simply wrong. We have consulted with Lockheed Martin and with other contractors. We consulted with experts from the other eight MOU partners for over a decade. It is a shame the Parliamentary Budget Officer did not consult with Lockheed Martin as well, or any of those other partners.

In fact, the total cost we are talking about for 20 years, plus the acquisition of the airplane, is \$16 billion. That amounts to \$25 per Canadian per year. That is a small price to pay for the protection of Canadians' sovereignty and Canadian values abroad.

At the same time, we are maintaining all the funding for health care.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after you issued your ruling regarding the government, we are stuck in the unfortunate position of judging the bad person, the Minister of International Cooperation, who is accused of being in contempt for misleading Parliament. But it seems clear that it was the Prime Minister who was pulling the strings in this case.

Does the Minister of International Cooperation realize that she will pay the price for the Prime Minister's decisions?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I respect your ruling. I look forward to attending the procedures and House affairs committee and I will fully co-operate to provide the needed clarity.

Oral Questions

These are decisions that I have been tasked with the responsibility to make. This is how we are improving the lives of children in developing countries. For example, we have increased enrolment in the schools in Senegal to over 90%. We have increased vaccination. This is making good use of taxpayer dollars.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in honour of the Genie Awards tonight, I imagine that a screenwriter could have presented a film entitled *Approved or Not Approved*, financed with public money, and, in the category of best supporting actress, we could have seen the Minister of International Cooperation, and in the categories of best director, best actor and best makeup, we could have seen the Prime Minister himself.

Will the government admit that it has utterly failed to deliver on its election promises of more transparency and ethics?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we respect the institution that you represent. You have given your rulings and we will do everything possible to comply with the decisions you have made.

One thing is clear: the Bloc is trying to do everything it can to create a distraction and trigger an opportunistic and needless election that would cost Canadians over \$400 million.

What do Canadians want? They want us to remain focused on the economy, economic growth and job creation. That is what Canadians expect.

* * *

POLITICAL FINANCING

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, unlike the funding for the films that will be celebrated at tonight's Genie Awards, the \$4 million the Conservatives plan to spend on budget propaganda will come out of taxpayers' pockets.

After the in and out scandal, the immigration minister's soliciting activities and Conservative Party organizers on the Senate payroll, now the government has found yet another way to pay for its election expenses out of public funds. It is obscene.

When will the Prime Minister learn to distinguish between government business and Conservative Party business?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Finance has routinely allocated money to inform Canadians about measures that may benefit them. This public information campaign was laid out at the start of the fiscal year in April 2010.

Given the time frame of March 22 for this year's budget, it is unlikely the entire amount will be spent and whatever remains will be returned to the consolidated general revenue fund.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, like the Liberals before them, the Conservatives have no problem diverting public resources for their partisan purposes. But instead of shamelessly stealing from the EI fund like the Liberals, they are passing their election expenses on to the people.

On the eve of a possible spring election, can the government at least promise to cancel its partisan budget ad campaign and pay back the \$200,000 obtained from Elections Canada using false invoices?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Québec must answer to this: on July 15, 2004, the Bloc Québécois transferred \$17,071.20 to the local election campaign of the member for Québec. The very next day, that same candidate transferred \$17,071.20 to the Bloc Québécois. That is an example of the in and out system. How does she explain that?

* * *

● (1430)

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, your ruling yesterday was very important, and I quote:

...there is no doubt that an order to produce documents is not being fully complied with, and this is a serious matter that goes to the heart of the House's undoubted role in holding the government to account.

The Prime Minister must put an end to this charade. Will he order the immediate tabling of all the documents on the costs of his bills?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me at the outset, on behalf of all members of the House, welcome back the leader of the New Democratic Party. We may spar on issues from time to time, but I have great respect for him and his values.

We also respect the Speaker's decision of yesterday. We have stated that we believed we had provided the information requested. We appreciate the ruling and we will be working very hard to comply with it in the days ahead.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank all my hon. colleagues for the welcome back. It makes it hard for me to ask some of these questions.

What we need to see is some leadership. The courts have ruled, Parliament has spoken and the Speaker has spoken. When will the Prime Minister respect the ruling of the Speaker and ensure that the real cost of his legislation is tabled before the House? It is a reasonable request being made by all Canadians. He has to take some responsibility for these—

The Speaker: The hon. government House leader.

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): We respect your ruling, Mr. Speaker, and we will be working to comply with it in the days ahead. The Liberal member for Kings—Hants has presented a motion to the House about having a committee look into it and report back. We will be working very hard to comply with that measure.

We will not be pushed away from the fundamental priority of Canadians, which is jobs and the economy. We are working tremendously hard on the budget to provide more hope and more opportunity. We have seen the creation of some 460,000 net new jobs over the past 18 months because of solid economic leadership.

Oral Questions

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that Canadians are having an increasingly difficult time in being able to trust the Prime Minister, who routinely hides the truth. We increasingly are finding out about that here. We have seen a disregard for transparency. We even have the celebration of ministers who have doctored documents to hide the truth. This is bothering a lot of Canadians.

Canadians are having trouble trusting a government and a Prime Minister that would let his campaign team fake invoices and break election laws.

When is the Prime Minister going to step up, fess up and clean up his cabinet?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have said that we will be working very hard to comply with your ruling.

We remain focused on the priorities of Canadians, jobs and the economy. In every part of my riding and every part of the country, these remain the priorities of Canadians.

We will be bringing down a budget in a few short weeks. The single priority in that budget is the creation of jobs, the creation of hope, the creation of opportunity. That is the priority of Canadians. They do not want an unnecessary election. They want us focused on creating jobs for them and not trying to get new jobs for ourselves.

* * *

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have yet another example of wasteful spending by the government for Conservative propaganda. Treasury Board documents show it plans to spend \$4 million in one week to advertise the 2011 budget. That is over \$35,000 for every waking hour of the week.

The Conservatives will spend more in one hour on self-promotion than a person in my riding makes in an entire year. Four million dollars would buy 4,000 medical scans for waiting Canadians.

When will the government stop the abuse of power?

● (1435)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I am sure the member opposite noticed, this question was just asked about five minutes ago.

The Department of Finance routinely has allocated to it some money to inform Canadians about benefits in the budget and other steps taken by the Department of Finance with respect to benefits for Canadians.

The budget this year is scheduled for March 22, so there will not be that much time left in the fiscal year. I anticipate that a good part of the money will not be spent and then it will be returned to the consolidated revenue fund.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not a government, it is a propaganda machine. Just look at all the money being wasted to put up signs. A doorknob is changed and a

sign goes up. A doorbell is repaired and a sign goes up. A sign has probably already gone up to announce the upcoming installation of another sign. The government is going to blow \$4 million on an ad campaign on the budget.

How many hospital beds, how many nurses, how many people can we take care of for \$4 million?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Liberal government in the mid-1990s, we will not balance the budget in our country by taking money away from hospitals and schools. That is what Liberals did. They did it dramatically. They did it unilaterally. They did it without consultation.

It resulted in fewer doctors in Canada, especially in rural Canada. It resulted in closed hospitals across the country. It resulted in teachers being laid off, all done by the Liberal government of the 1990s.

We will not repeat that mistake.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FORMER PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the average worker in Madawaska—Restigouche earns just over \$26,000 a year. The former so-called integrity commissioner received hundreds of complaints and resolved none. When she resigned, the Conservatives gave her just over half a million dollars. She resigned and stayed at home, yet she is getting more than the average worker will earn in 20 years.

How can the Conservatives show such disregard for Canadian workers and pensioners?

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our priority is to protect our workers. In this case, the government sought legal advice. We followed that advice. I believe that within the hour, the individual my colleague referred to will appear before the committee, and that is the appropriate place to discuss the situation.

[*English*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it would take 20 years for the average worker in my riding to earn as much as the former integrity commissioner received in a single day, that \$500,000 she received for quitting, not working.

The minister claims he is trying to recover the \$500,000 in hush money he gave her to cover up this obvious Conservative sham. Why did he give her the \$500,000 in the first place? What is the Prime Minister trying to hide?

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): First, Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased to see the Information Commissioner's report today, talking about improvements in access to information, if that is what the member is talking about.

Oral Questions

The government sought legal advice on the matter that my hon. colleague has mentioned. We have followed that advice. In less than an hour, the former commissioner will appear before the all party parliamentary committee that approved her hiring in the first place. That is the appropriate place for the discussion to be followed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, either the former Treasury Board president is a bad negotiator, having signed an employment contract that would pay out half a million dollars to Christiane Ouimet even if she were fired, or the contract did not have such a clause and the Conservatives bought her silence with half a million dollars. At best, they are incompetent; at worst, they are irresponsible.

Will the President of the Treasury Board table the employment contract so that we can check whether he promised at the outset to pay \$500,000 to Christiane Ouimet?

• (1440)

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, regarding the contract, we indicated that our position would be clear. We have nothing to hide. The former commissioner will appear before the committee in 40 or 45 minutes. I hope my colleague will listen to everything she has to say.

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, he is the one we are asking. The royal treatment given to the former Public Sector Integrity Commissioner is completely outrageous, particularly in light of the fact that former employees were forced to retire and lost some of their benefits.

How can the government justify signing an agreement to pay \$500,000 to someone who is incompetent, unless it is to buy that person's silence? This is reminiscent of a line from a song from *The Godfather*: "Speak softly...so no one hears us".

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our priority continues to be the protection of our public sector workers. As I said before, we are prepared to be very open about all aspects of this situation. We have now appointed a new commissioner who will continue to monitor and investigate all cases. The former commissioner will appear before the committee in 45 minutes.

* * *

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to the television program *Enquête*, the government has had for a number of years information which proves that some employees in the Montreal office tried to get bribes in exchange for their complacency. However, the Conservative government, which was elected in 2006, has been dragging its feet since that time, just like it did in the Cinar case.

Can the minister tell us why his government has not been able to clean things up at the revenue agency? More importantly, how does he explain the fact that no charges have yet been laid?

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of National Revenue, Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister for

the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we take these allegations very seriously. The RCMP is currently investigating the case.

Let us be clear. These allegations go back more than a decade.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government is incapable of assuming its responsibilities. It is always trying to evade the issue by saying that investigations are going on. The fact is that the federal government has known for years that there are some bad apples in the Montreal office, but no charges have yet been laid.

We are not asking the minister to give names. We are asking him to tell us since when he has had this stunning information and why he has not acted sooner. It is very simple.

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of National Revenue, Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, because this investigation is with the RCMP, we will wait for the RCMP investigation to be completed.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past Monday the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism could not explain to the media where data used for targeting so-called "very ethnic" ridings came from. He said it may have been publicly available or perhaps commercially available. He told the CBC he would get back to it shortly.

Will the minister now tell the House who paid for the data used in the "Breaking Through" document and its appendices and provide a complete financial accounting to the Canadian taxpayers?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that demographic data is commercially available from Statistics Canada and other sources. The Conservative Party acquires that kind of data all the time.

If the member wants to ask the Conservative Party about its business, he should write to the Conservative Party. This is not a matter of government administration.

Let me be clear. That data was not acquired from Citizenship and Immigration Canada. It was not acquired using the resources in my department in any respect.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today Kevin Gaudet, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's director, called for an investigation into the minister's use of government resources to win votes.

He said:

When you see the letter, when you see the increase of spending, all those things feed into the question of whether or not ministerial resources are being appropriately used, which is why we think there should be an investigation.

Oral Questions

Would the minister, who was once president and CEO of the same federation, agree to an independent review of government resources being used by his office for Conservative political gain?

• (1445)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already told the House several times, last week, as soon as I learned that a member of my staff erroneously used 26 pieces of parliamentary stationery when my personal stationery ought to have been used, I reported the matter to you, sir. I sent you a \$10.00 cheque in reimbursement. I reported the matter to the Ethics Commissioner. She is free to ask any questions that she would like.

However, the real question is, why is the Liberal Party trying to divert attention from its 13 years of failure to deliver on the priorities and aspirations of new Canadians? That is why the Liberals are trying to deflect the attention from their failed record.

* * *

[Translation]

POLITICAL FINANCING

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nine Conservative members shared close to \$200,000 stolen from taxpayers.

This was a fraud that was created, planned, monitored and then hidden by top Conservative Party officials.

They often talk about the rights of the victims of Earl Jones.

When will these nine members give back the money stolen by the Conservative Party from their victims, the taxpayers?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is simply wrong.

However, I will give her the occasion to explain why, on July 26, 2004, the Liberal Party of Canada transferred exactly \$5,000 to the local campaign of Aileen Carroll, in the riding of Barrie, who then transferred that money back roughly 10 days later, exactly \$5,000, on August 6. That is \$5,000 in, \$5,000 out. That is an in and out transaction.

I invite her to stand and explain what is different about that transaction from the ones that were undertaken by the Conservative Party.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they broke the law. They falsified invoices. They committed fraud. Four senior Conservatives are now facing the possibility of jail. This was not a few renegade criminals. This fraud was created, it was conducted, it was controlled by the Conservative Party. This was a planned Conservative Party fraud and it was a fraud against Canadian taxpayers.

When will they pay the—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 5, 2006, the Liberal Party of Canada transferred \$5,350 to the Liberal campaign in Malpeque, which then transferred back, on the exact same day, \$5,350.

In the riding of Don Valley West, the Liberal Party transferred \$5,000 on January 9, 2004, which then transferred \$5,000 back to the Liberal Party on July 15 of the same year.

In Barrie, there was \$5,000 in on July 26, 2004, and \$5,000 out on August 6—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for my hon. colleague, the Minister of Public Works.

The priority of my constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country is the economy. The priority of Canadians is the economy. The priority of this government is the economy.

Yesterday, the Minister of Public Works and the Minister of Natural Resources announced that the government has pre-qualified its first 19 innovations which it may buy and test as part of the kick-start program.

Would the minister please provide the House with the details of that announcement and this program?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Kelowna—Lake Country is right. The economy is the top priority of our government. We are pleased to support entrepreneurs who are delivering Canadian innovations with cutting-edge technology.

From a new technology to deal with oil spills from Halifax, to a new innovation from Ottawa to react to pandemics, this program would help kick-start innovative business ideas by helping them move from late-stage research, to development, into commercialization.

This is how we keep the economy moving, by supporting Canadian ideas and Canadian businesses.

* * *

• (1450)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the F-35s, Conservatives are using 10-year-old costing numbers provided by Lockheed Martin, the manufacturer. They did not even bother to do their own analysis.

According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the price tag for the F-35s now nears \$30 billion, not the \$16 billion claimed. This would cost us more than the entire war in Afghanistan.

Oral Questions

How can the government be trusted when it is not telling Canadians the truth about the real cost of these jets?

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again my colleague is simply wrong.

For openers, we based our costs on 20 years of service. Mr. Page added another 10 years to that. Clearly that is going to increase his number. Throw in some questionable assumptions that he used, instead of consulting the expert people we have in our program, the expert people in the eight other countries' programs. Why would he not have talked to them? He did very little or no consultation with Lockheed Martin or any of the people who actually know about the program.

We stand by the estimates of our experts and the experts of the other eight partner nations.

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that cost overruns for the F-35 fighter jets will total approximately \$12 billion. It seems that we will have to shell out \$29.3 billion, not \$16 billion.

The report also highlights the absolute lack of guaranteed industrial and regional spinoffs. This is not surprising. Since there is not even a contract, there cannot be any guarantee that jobs will be created.

How can the Conservatives justify spending \$29 billion without any guarantee that this will generate economic spinoffs and create jobs?

[English]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, cost overruns for research and development are being borne by the United States government.

Let me quote Mr. Claude Lajeunesse, president of AIAC:

The Government's leadership will ensure that Canada, along with its NATO counterparts, continues to play a key role in defending the values dear to all Canadians. The Next Generation Fighter is the single largest military aircraft procurement program of the Government of Canada in the foreseeable future and will positively affect the Canadian aerospace industry for decades to come.

Our government's top priority is growing the economy and creating jobs. We are committed to delivering a budget later this month and working on the priorities of Canadians which is the economy, not a needless election.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the effects of the crisis are still evident, especially in the regions, and many workers are now without income as their benefits have stopped and they wait to return to seasonal work, the Conservative government continues to pillage the employment insurance fund instead of helping workers.

Does the government plan on using the upcoming budget to revise its policy on the unemployed by proposing substantial EI reforms, in order to increase benefits and make it easier to access the system?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have done a lot to help the unemployed in the past three years. We added five weeks to employment insurance and opened it up to self-employed workers. We also provided special benefits for long-tenured workers. I am doubtful of the Bloc's sincerity, since it voted against all of these measures that would help vulnerable people.

* * *

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of State for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec boasted about having injected new funds into the assistance program for silvicultural work. But he forgot to clarify that the work needs to be done by March 31, 2011 in order to benefit from the funding.

Instead of uselessly tooting his own horn, will the minister grant the industry's request and extend the program for silvicultural work?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, for years this member refuted the fact that the crisis was caused by the market and new products.

In an article last week, he finally acknowledged what he had been denying for years. After harping on for years about loan guarantees, he realized that the ruling in London sided with the government. What we have been saying since the start is entirely true.

What has he done to help Quebec's forestry industry? Nothing. Just words. We are doing our job.

* * *

●(1455)

[English]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of International Cooperation told us that she was going to be co-operating fully with the committee and answering fully all questions. Perhaps we could start here at home in the House of Commons.

I would like to ask the minister once again, who did she speak to in that two-month gap between the CIDA recommendation and her decision on KAIROS? Who in the Prime Minister's Office did she speak to? Did she speak to the minister of immigration? Who did she talk to before she made her decision?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to be clear, I am assuming that the hon. member is asking particularly about that one funding decision, not about everybody I spoke to in those two months.

Oral Questions

Regarding that, as I have indicated, I consulted with my staff. I got full briefings from the department. I have not specifically had any conversation with the minister of immigration, because it was not directly related to development or his responsibilities.

I made the decision. I wanted to make sure that taxpayers' dollars were being used—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here we go again. We have asked 90 questions, and she has yet to give a direct response. We will continue to raise this issue.

Why, to this point, has the Minister of Immigration been the only one to explain the government's decision when he spoke about KAIROS and Israel? Did the minister discuss the speech that he gave in Israel with the Minister of International Cooperation?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, there were no conversations regarding KAIROS between me and the minister of immigration.

However, this is really important. I have answered the hon. member's question, but again I want Canadians to know how we are spending their money. Today I am pleased to announce that Canada is supporting the Afghan-Canadian Community Centre where 1,800 people have received literacy training; 85% of them are women and 83% of the graduates have received employment.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, along with the NDP and Canadian doctors, now the Confédération des syndicats nationaux also opposes the mining and export of asbestos. Unfortunately, the Conservatives and the Bloc continue to support this industry for the worst political reasons. The asbestos industry is ruining Quebec's and Canada's reputation around the globe. It is time to create a transition plan for the workers in the region.

Will they put an end to the hypocrisy and stop funding the industry?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for over 30 years, Canada has supported the safe and controlled use of chrysotile, both nationally and internationally. Recent scientific journals report that chrysotile asbestos can be used safely in a controlled manner. It is a question of managing the risk.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known and Canada's policy on asbestos is morally and ethically reprehensible. Asbestos is banned in most countries, and yet Canada exports, dumps I should say, 200,000 tonnes per year in under-developed and third world countries.

Today Quebec's largest labour group joined the international efforts to ban asbestos. Yet the Minister of Natural Resources and the Bloc Québécois still defend the asbestos cartel.

Will the minister stand up for the safety and health of the industrial workers of the world or will he side with the corporate serial killers that are exporting this made in Canada epidemic?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a great deal of confusion about this issue, which is contentious, to say the least. Let me be clear: we are talking about chrysotile asbestos fibre and the controlled, safe use of that substance. The illnesses seen in the past resulted from the misuse of various fibres, including chrysotile, since their use was not properly controlled. What we are saying is that for the past 30 years, we have supported the safe use of chrysotile fibres in a controlled setting. I repeat: it is a question of managing the risk.

* * *

• (1500)

[*English*]

PENSIONS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has been focused on protecting Canadian workers since coming to office in 2006. We have introduced the wage earner protection program to provide support for Canadian workers who face a bankrupt employer while still being owed wages, termination and severance pay. We have made unpaid wages a super priority in a bankruptcy and the Minister of Finance is working with his provincial counterparts to reform Canada's pension system.

Can the minister please update the House on the reckless efforts of the opposition in this respect?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, last night the Liberal-NDP-Bloc coalition ganged up again and supported en masse Bill C-501 that would ensure, and listen to this closely, folks, that CEOs and their friends get a larger share of the remaining assets while workers are left with little or nothing.

As a government, we have implemented the wage earner protection program to protect workers' severance and termination pay. But that is what they have been working on, this multi-million dollar severance plan for their CEO friends. That is what they work on when they are not trying to engineer—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laval—Les Îles.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no end to the arrogance of this Prime Minister. The Conservatives wanted to limit the privileges of this House. They use government resources to engage in politicking. They even engineered a major electoral fraud. And now the Prime Minister wants officials to no longer refer to the Government of Canada, but to the “H government” instead.

Oral Questions

The Government of Canada does not belong to him; Canada does not belong to him either. Does the Prime Minister understand that what he is doing is an abuse of power and that he is insulting all Canadians?

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a practice that was used for a long time by different governments. In fact, the practice was supported by the former clerk of the Privy Council. It is a practice that was used by president of the Privy Council. This is no different.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, leaders of various first nations communities and police chiefs are speaking out about the proposed cuts to police services. The Conservative government intends to cut funding for police services in Quebec by 19% when this essential service is already underfunded.

Why is this government, which claims to be tough on crime, refusing to shoulder its responsibilities in aboriginal communities?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government continues to support the first nations policing program. I have personally spoken with the Assembly of First Nations' National Chief, Shawn Atleo, to confirm our government's commitment to this important program. A proposal for renewal of the FNPP is a part of the budget process, a standard yearly exercise.

I know that the member for Wascana wants to stand and ask another question. The member for Wascana just keeps rattling on and on. Perhaps he could actually get up and ask an intelligent question.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have seen this government's contempt for Canada's democratic institutions. Now it is official languages' turn. I quote the Chief Operating Officer of Service Canada: "... the administrative structure of the Atlantic region is unilingual." In the Atlantic region there is an officially bilingual province and there are over 450,000 francophones. That does not seem to be enough for the Conservatives to require that the Atlantic region administrative structure be bilingual. This is an affront to language rights.

Is the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development prepared today to designate the Atlantic region administrative structure bilingual?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every Canadian, in every region of the country, has the right to government services in the official language of their choice. Our government is committed, in accordance with the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality, to ensuring that every Canadian has that right to government services in

the official language of their choice. When problems or concerns are raised here in the House or elsewhere, we take concrete measures, and we will certainly find solutions for any problems there are.

* * *

• (1505)

[English]

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal-led coalition is flinging baseless rumours and innuendo to justify the opportunistic election it so desperately wants. Unfortunately, as it tries to throw mud, its own ethical breaches are leaving it dirty.

Could the parliamentary secretary update this House on the priority of this government?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the priority of this government is the economy and jobs. We are getting it done on both of those subjects. We have had six consecutive quarters of growth. We have had five million Canadians invest in the tax free savings accounts—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The parliamentary secretary has the floor. We will have some order.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, five million Canadians have invested in tax free savings accounts, and 460,000 net new jobs have been created since July 2009. Unemployment is two points lower than in the United States for the first time in a generation.

That is the reason we are in and they are out.

* * *

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Hon. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, Ind. Cons.): Mr. Speaker, it has been a year since the Prime Minister advised the country of unsubstantiated allegations against me and asked the RCMP to investigate. The result was a set of flimsy allegations that had absolutely no substance, and the RCMP file was closed. I have made an access to information and personal information request under the Privacy Act to receive a copy of the RCMP report to provide some insight to my constituents. It is an extremely frustrating process.

PCO, DFAIT, and the Lobbying Commissioner were all given the deadline of February 28 to respond. The Lobbying Commissioner has responded, but PCO and DFAIT have not. Could the government confirm that it will delay no further and release this information?

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am quite surprised to see the member for Malpeque giving the member for Simcoe—Grey a standing ovation. I thought I had seen everything.

Let me say to the hon. member for Simcoe—Grey that I will certainly take her question to the appropriate authorities, and we will do everything we can to ensure that all of the access to information laws are followed. I can only tell the member for Simcoe—Grey that at least she does not have to make an access request to the CBC because then she would never get anything.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order, please.

I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of two ministers from Manitoba, the Hon. Bill Blaikie, Minister of Conservation; and the Hon. Andrew Swan, Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of a recipient of the John Diefenbaker Defender of Human Rights and Freedom Award, the Reverend Benjamin H. Yoon, founder and chairman of the Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the government House leader inform us of the government's plans for the business of the House for the remainder of this week, as well as the week of March 21.

Mr. Speaker, given the extremely serious nature of your rulings yesterday, could the House leader confirm that the government will fully comply with the rulings? Will he pledge that the Conservative members on the Procedure and House Affairs Committee will try not to disrupt or filibuster the work of the committee? Very specifically, will he tell us when we can expect to receive all of the documents that the House has ordered the government to turn over?

In the case of the motion relating to the costs on F-35 fighter jets, corporate tax cuts and the government's law and order agenda, it is important for Canadians to know and to remember that the original request for this information and these financial details was made on November 17, many months ago. We are now in a situation where there is simply no justification for any further delays.

• (1510)

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to your ruling yesterday, we are working right now as we speak to comply on that issue and we will be responding in short order.

We will continue debate today on the Bloc opposition motion that began this morning.

Tomorrow, we will call for third reading of Bill C-55, the new veterans charter bill. I appreciate that there has been support for the passage of that bill. It is important for Canada's veterans and I am pleased that we have been able to come together on that.

Privilege

Following Bill C-55, if time permits, we would debate Bill C-54, protecting children from sexual predators; Bill S-7, the justice for victims of terrorism; Bill C-8, the Canada-Jordan free trade agreement; Bill C-12, the democratic representation bill, which is an important bill for my premier in Ontario and particularly for the people in both Alberta and British Columbia; Bill C-46, the Canada-Panama free trade agreement; Bill C-57, improving trade within Canada; Bill C-43, RCMP modernization; Bill C-52, investigating and preventing criminal electronic communications; and Bill C-50, improving access to investigative tools for serious crime.

With respect to the business for next week, I will be, among other places, working hard in my constituency for the people of Ottawa West—Nepean.

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PRIVILEGE

SIT-IN AT HILL OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS MINISTER

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a question of privilege in regard to a disturbing event that took place yesterday in my office at the Confederation Building.

The stunt was orchestrated by the NDP member for Churchill. It was what I would call a very serious breach of trust among those of us in the House and a breach of privilege because the employees in my office were prevented from doing their work. It is a cause for concern for even members of the other place.

With a number of media outlets and their cameras in tow, the NDP member of Parliament helped orchestrate a protest and sit-in in my office. While her guests occupied my office, she pressed my staff for an immediate meeting and played up this shocking incident for the cameras.

Not for one minute am I attempting to minimize the concerns of those people who occupied my office. I understand their concerns and my staff has indicated that we will work with them. However, I am truly troubled that a member of this House would orchestrate the takeover of another member's office and make a member's staff uncomfortable as a result of this breach.

Security was eventually called to help clear out the office without incident but, frankly, there is no assurance that such a stunt will not happen again in my office or in any other member's office in this place or in the other place.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you to look into this serious matter from a security standpoint, as well as a privilege standpoint for members. It was wrong, it was a violation of my office and my staff, and I do not think the member would think twice about doing it again.

One month ago, the same member asked me for a meeting. She received a one hour meeting within short order. I thought we had established a relationship.

Business of Supply

This is the first time in my 15 years in this place that I have ever been subject to such an incident. The behaviour of the NDP member for Churchill is not worthy of an elected member of Parliament.

• (1515)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to comment on the particular activities, because I was not there, but I want the House to know that the Indian band in question was taken from its town by the federal government and dropped on the shores of Hudson Bay with no place to live. I think they are pretty upset with the government and would like to meet with the minister.

The Speaker: I think we will leave this matter. I will take the incident under advisement. I expect we may be hearing from some other member later and we will deal with that later. I will get back to the House in due course in respect of this one.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, in view of the events in the National Hockey League in relation to the Chara-Paciorety incident, for example, and what is happening with Sidney Crosby, I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to move the following motion: that the House condemn the National Hockey League for not taking action to crack down on unnecessary, dangerous physical play that occurs during games and that jeopardizes the health of NHL players, and call on league managers and the players' association to take action to put a stop to this scourge.

[English]

Enough is enough.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on an issue arising out of question period today.

A government member asked the Minister of Industry a question and I was very disappointed with his answer. On top of that, I believe the Minister of Industry misled the House with his answer when he neglected to say that Bill C-501 would protect every worker in this country.

I believe the Minister of Industry should be making an apology to workers right across Canada. In fact, he should be apologizing to the people who worked for Buchanan Forest Products in my riding, many of whom received no severance pay, no termination pay, pensions or anything of the kind.

If you look at the blues, Mr. Speaker, you will find that his answer was purely intended to mislead the House and Canadians.

The Speaker: The Chair does not get in on the questions or responses and decide whether the matters are facts or not. It is simply beyond the Chair's competence to make that kind of decision. I think the hon. member is really getting into a debate here rather than a

point of order. It does not strike me as being a procedural matter, which of course is what the Speaker is here to decide upon, not the other. I do not think there was a valid point of order there.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CONDUCT OF THE GOVERNMENT

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Before question period, the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie had the floor. She still has 16 minutes for her remarks.

The hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had reached the fifth point in my list of government breaches of parliamentary privilege. We were talking in particular about a “very ethnic” fundraising letter from the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

The minister was caught red-handed using public resources to market a Conservative advertising campaign targeting what he called “very ethnic” ridings. The minister has been denounced for the serious conflict of interest between his responsibility to develop fair policies as the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and his political job of delivering the votes of new Canadians. In addition to the conflict of interest, his description of ridings as “very ethnic” raises much doubt about the Conservatives' respect for new Canadians.

I want to turn now to the departure of Christiane Ouimet and the gag order on her. After the independent Public Service Integrity Commissioner resigned in disgrace for sweeping aside 228 whistleblower complaints, this Conservative regime gave her more than \$500,000 in severance pay and made her sign a gag order. Canadians deserve to know what role the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office played in rejecting embarrassing whistleblower cases without an investigation.

Moving along to the dishonesty of the Minister of International Cooperation, over 24,000 people have signed a petition calling for her to resign after she misled Parliament about falsifying a ministerial document. Even though she faces censure for breaching parliamentary privilege, the minister refuses to step down or answer very specific questions about her conduct. Instead of saying this dishonesty has no place in Parliament, the Prime Minister continues to shield and even applaud her.

The Minister of International Cooperation breached a basic principle of our democratic system by straight-out misleading Canadians about the falsified documents. In any other line of work, she would have been fired. The Prime Minister should immediately relieve her of her position. Continuing to protect her is totally unacceptable.

Business of Supply

My colleague, the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, has referred the question to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs so that it can recommend an appropriate sanction and report to the House on the question before March 25.

“Own the Podium”, in the most literal sense: after the prime minister’s speech at the celebration of the Year of India event, the Prime Minister’s Office tried to muzzle the leader of the opposition by removing the podium and ushering the journalists present out of the room before his speech. In the end, it was the Prime Minister who was embarrassed for misusing government resources and treating Canada’s ethnic communities like mere pawns on the political chessboard.

Now let us talk about the obscurantism of government documents relating to the arena in Quebec City. The Conservative regime is so afraid of negative political fallout over the Quebec City arena proposal that it is treating the debate on this issue like a matter of national security. It has censored the background information on its position on funding an NHL-calibre arena in Quebec City.

The hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill has also breached the code of ethics. Before she was questioned on this specific subject in the House of Commons, the Conservative minister from Calgary—Nose Hill did not know that she had been fined by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner for “failure to disclose a material change” and she was cited for failing to pay the fine. The member is the third minister of this government and the tenth Conservative public office holder to be fined by the commissioner, joining previous wrongdoers such as the defence minister.

Now let us move to the attack on public servants over the F-35s. The recent attack by the Conservative member for Edmonton Centre on the highly respected former deputy minister of defence, Mr. Alan Williams, shows that the Conservatives can only resort to name calling when it comes to justifying their \$29 billion untendered fighter jet purchase.

• (1520)

The facts speak for themselves. On the weekend the media reported that the Conservatives have no legitimate argument to support their claims about the purchase and maintenance costs of the F-35s.

Canadians are seeing this government in its true light. The Conservatives have abused their power and damaged our democracy. They have demonstrated nothing but contempt for Parliament and for Canadians. They are out of touch with the priorities of middle-class families.

• (1525)

[*English*]

In the interest of clarity, here are just the facts in the other official language, including 10 instances of Conservative regime recent abuses of power. The Conservative regime’s culture of secrecy and deceit is adding up and as official opposition, it is our duty to bring light to these issues.

With respect to hiding corporate taxes, megaprison and F-35 costs, the Conservative regime failed to comply with the motion demanding that by March 7 it provide the House of Commons with

details concerning its plans to spend billions of tax dollars on corporate tax cuts, prison expansions and untendered stealth fighters.

Hiding these costs undermines the credibility of the entire budget. We need answers on these matters before the budget is tabled. The member for Kings—Hants has referred to the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and is demanding that it report back to the House by March 21.

With respect to the in and out election fraud, the Prime Minister’s inner circle stands accused of a \$1.2 million scam to break election spending limits and buy more attack ads than those permitted. Senior Conservatives wired money in to local campaigns and transferred the money right back out to the national campaign. Now they face serious charges involving potential jail time.

When candidates claimed the transfers to get \$800,000 more than allowed by Elections Canada, it stepped in.

The Prime Minister is using public resources for partisan purposes by forcing federal public servants to replace the words “Government of Canada” with the “H Government”. Canadians know it is not the Prime Minister’s government. It belongs to all citizens.

With respect to the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism’s very ethnic fundraising letter, the insulting nature of the very ethnic definition by and of itself is a matter for concern. Furthermore, the citizenship and immigration minister was caught using public resources for polling and marketing a Conservative advertising campaign aimed at what he called “very ethnic ridings”. The minister has been exposed for serious conflict of interest between his responsibility to make fair policies as the citizenship and immigration minister and his political role of delivering the votes of new Canadians.

With respect to Christiane Ouimet’s gag order and severance pay, after the independent public service integrity commissioner resigned in disgrace for sweeping aside 228 whistleblower complaints, the Conservative regime paid her more than \$500,000 and made her sign a gag order. Canadians deserve to know what role the Prime Minister Office’s and the Privy Council Office’s had in influencing the dismissal of embarrassing whistleblower cases, involving all sorts of misuse of government resources.

With respect to the Minister of International Cooperation’s dishonesty, over 24,000 people signed a petition calling for the international cooperation minister to resign after she misled Parliament about ordering a ministerial document to be falsified. Even though she faces censure for breaching parliamentary privilege, the minister refuses to step down or answer questions about her conduct. Instead of saying this dishonesty has no place in Parliament, the Prime Minister continues to shield her and even applauds his minister.

Business of Supply

The Minister of International Cooperation has breached the privileges of our democratic system by blatantly misleading Canadians about forging documents. In any other job, this would get someone fired. The Prime Minister should immediately fire her from cabinet. This is unacceptable.

My colleague, the MP for Scarborough—Guildwood, has referred the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to recommend the appropriate punishment and is demanding that they report back to the House by March 25.

With respect to “own the podium”, after the Prime Minister spoke at the celebration of the year of India event, the Prime Minister's office tried to muzzle the Leader of the Opposition by removing the podium and ushering the media out of the room before his speech. In the end, it was the Prime Minister who was embarrassed for misusing government resources and treating Canada's ethnic communities like mere political pawns.

With respect to the Quebec City arena documents, the Conservative regime is so afraid of political fallout over the Quebec City arena proposal that it is treating the debate like a national security threat, after blacking out background documents that would have made our position clear on the funding, or not, of this NHL-calibre arena in Quebec City.

• (1530)

Regarding the member for Calgary—Nose Hill's ethics breach, until she was questioned about it in the House of Commons, she had no idea that she had been fined by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and cited for failing to pay the fine. The member is the third Conservative minister and the 10th Conservative public office holder overall to be fined by the commissioner, joining previous wrongdoers like the Minister of National Defence.

With respect to lashing out at public servants on F-35s, the Conservative MP for Edmonton Centre's recent attack on the respected former assistant deputy minister of defence, Alan Williams, shows that the Conservatives can only resort to name calling when it comes to justifying their \$16 billion, or should I say \$29 billion, untendered fighter jet purchase. A media report over the weekend also indicated that the Conservatives did not have a leg to stand on when it came to backing up their claims on the purchase or maintenance costs of the F-35s.

Furthermore, the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed this morning that all estimates so far provided by the Conservative government were totally out of synch with reality.

Canadians are seeing the government for what it really is. The Conservatives have abused their power, attacked our democracy and have showed nothing but contempt for Parliament and the Canadian people. They have lost touch with the priorities of middle-class families, which is why I will vote in support of the motion from the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the comments of the hon. member from the other side of the House.

I find it quite humorous that the Liberals think they have moral rights and that they, in particular, have no responsibilities. Under

their former prime minister, Mr. Chrétien, they, with their minions, developed a thing called the “adscam”. Through that convoluted process, they happened to steal millions of dollars from the Canadian taxpayers, and have only repaid \$1 million at this point in time. They funnelled that money into 13 Liberal ridings in Quebec.

My question for the Liberal Party is this. What government resources did it use at the time it was stealing the more than \$40 million? Did it use government brown envelopes to distribute the cash that we know was distributed to the various Liberal ridings in Quebec?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I find it curious that my colleagues on the Conservative side have very selective memories.

First, may I remind the member that a Liberal government called a public inquiry into the supposed adscam. It was a program that the Liberals had created. We paid back every penny that Justice Gomery asked us to pay.

[*Translation*]

Everything that the Gomery commission accused us of allegedly misappropriating in that matter has been paid back to Canadian taxpayers. But the present matter has nothing to do with the misappropriation of funds that happened 10 years ago. We are talking about what has just happened, about a government that promised, during the same campaign when it misappropriated all these funds, that it would be the purest and cleanest government that there ever was in Canada. That is what is offensive. It was a government full of promises.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to seek the opinion of my colleague from Brossard—La Prairie, since there is some recognition in what she has said of facts in the past involving the Liberals. This is not the subject of the debate, although we might make it the subject of the debate and draw a parallel. I think we would be happy to do that.

I believe we have to get to the heart of the matter. What is in issue today is the mistakes made by the party now in power. One of those mistakes is to identify the Canadian government as its own property, as its own personality—to the point that the Premier Ministre has named it after himself: “Preparation H”, or rather “the H Government”. Forgive me, because there is a similarity between the two when it comes to how they might be used.

This personalization is precisely the subject of my question. Does my colleague not think there is something here that is not just offensive, but flatly contemptuous of Canadian institutions and the Canadian people?

• (1535)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

It is contemptuous, but more importantly it is disturbing. My reaction when I heard that last Thursday was to ask myself what country we were living in. Since when does the Office of the Prime Minister appropriate the name of the government of the country as its own fiefdom? That is what is extremely troubling.

Business of Supply

The Government of Canada certainly belongs to all Canadians. It is much more than one person, much more than a Cabinet. The Government of Canada is all of our democratic institutions. I think that journalists or even some of our ministers may use the name of the Prime Minister when referring to the government. That was never an order or a directive from the Office of the Prime Minister when there were Liberal or even Progressive Conservative prime ministers. No prime minister has ever publicly told the federal public service to call the federal government by his name. Frankly, that is truly unacceptable for a country like Canada.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people back home really need to understand the extent of this scheme and the collusion. In and out is basically a money laundering scheme, where the Conservatives took money from the central campaign, laundered it through the accounts of dead dog ridings and then took the money back to pay for national advertising for which they were not eligible.

The Conservatives are trying to proclaim their innocence, but the jails are full of guys who say that it was administrative error when they got caught. The issue that people need to understand is there were kickbacks offered to the ridings so the ridings would claim money they did not deserve and ask taxpayers for money to which they were not entitled.

I have to be fair. Some riding associations were honest and refused to participate, but all across Canada rural and backwoods Conservative riding associations signed up for this scheme, which was essentially a money laundering scheme. We see the ones who are charged at the top, but what about the ranks of the Conservative Party who were involved in this scheme?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I do not have precise answers for the questions of my colleague because I do not fully understand the whole dimension of the problem myself. However, it is definitely reasonable to believe that this affected much more than only what we see as the in and out scheme.

I do not know how all the transactions were made. That is why Elections Canada is investigating and why this has gone to the courts. However, there is definitely cause for concern about whether the different echelons of the Conservative Party were involved.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an egregious way of trying to circumvent a particular rule when a certain amount of money is raised by a local association, somewhere in the vicinity of \$5,000 to \$10,000, and all of a sudden it qualifies itself for something twice that amount because the money went into a particular association and came back out. What is particularly egregious about this is there is all kinds of rhetoric being thrown around the House about money in and money out, but this one is so glaringly obvious.

On the news we saw visits to the Conservatives Party headquarters time and time again. I have yet to see visits to any other party's headquarters in the media. Why is that?

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: If I may, I am going to answer in French. It is important that this be clear.

The enormous difference between the doubts or questions raised about the Liberal Party a few years ago and the visits to the Conservative Party office by the various authorities, whether the RCMP or Elections Canada, is that the Liberal Party took the initiative of holding that commission of inquiry where the documents and evidence were submitted voluntarily. What the Conservatives have shown us since the beginning of this whole thing, since 2006, is that their hand has to be forced. They are not capable of admitting their mistakes, of admitting that they have made major mistakes, and they have forced us to go to these extremes.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the hon. member needs to get her facts straight on a couple of things.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer's numbers on the F-35 are based on 30 years. Our numbers are based on 20 years. I am not an expert, but I can tell members that 30 years versus 20 years is going to ramp up the cost.

There are two points about this F-35 program to consider. One, this is about jobs. This is about jobs in B.C., Alberta, Winnipeg, and Montreal. I do not know how in this economic downturn the members on the other side can be against that.

The other aspect of this is safety. We have five years left before the CF-18s cannot fly any more. They will hit their maximum number of hours. At the end of the day, this is not just about costs. It is about the safety of the men and women of the Canadian Forces who risk their lives every day for us.

I would like to ask the member, what is an acceptable cost of that safety?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I will start by acknowledging that I do not think my hon. colleague is an expert on the matter. I will just say that there are a lot of other planes that our air force could use and should use. We do not need stealth airplanes. Canada is a peaceful country. We certainly do not need those kinds of planes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I inform you straightaway that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead. It is an honour for me. She is a member I hold in great esteem. Not only does she do marvellous work here on Parliament Hill, but I know how devoted she is to her constituents, the people of her riding. I have had the opportunity to share responsibilities in human resources and social development with her for more than four or five years. I am mentioning this file first of all because it is most interesting to realize that the Conservatives are using this file, this responsibility, to engage in propaganda.

Business of Supply

There are two things at issue today on this Bloc opposition day: the Conservatives' hijacking of democracy and the propaganda they are spreading with the resources that the House makes available to the government and to ministers.

I shall not repeat the examples given by my colleagues, but I will use one very particular example, that of the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development. On February 26, 2011, the Canadian electoral authority formally charged the Prime Minister's Conservative Party with fraud, along with two senators from the party in power, namely the Conservatives. They allegedly concealed cost overruns during the 2006 election in an amount in excess of a million dollars. Two individuals have been targeted as respondents in this case: Mr. Irving Gerstein and Mr. Douglas Finley. The latter is not only a senator, but also the spouse of the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development.

There are some rather troubling things. Since this morning, we have been highlighting all the methods and stratagems that this government is using in order to deprive Parliament of the means it has to oversee, however slightly, what goes on in government, or at least to acquire information, and also in order to engage in propaganda. Here is what I am getting at. For four years, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development, and the Status of Persons with Disabilities was engaged in a very thorough study. This committee went all around Canada. We went to the provincial capitals, and often as well to villages and towns, to study, on site, the issue of poverty, which was the topic of our study. We held 68 different meetings, I believe. We also heard over 200 organizations. This led us to make 58 recommendations proposing ways of combatting poverty. You will recall that in November 2009, this House unanimously reiterated its desire to see poverty eliminated, or at least reduced, within 10 years.

This report was therefore entirely appropriate and entirely relevant. The only response that the minister was able to give us, which I have here in my hand, is a propaganda document. We have had no response on the 58 recommendations made by the committee.

• (1545)

The minister responded to each of the problems we raised by mentioning existing programs and giving the Conservative government credit for having instituted them. But there is no new program to reduce poverty. What is even more infuriating, and even scandalous, is that the minister simply disregards all the testimony from all over Canada describing the poverty of aboriginal populations and single-parent families, the fate of seniors and of people who lose their jobs, and the plight of children living in poverty. If there are poor children, it is because there are poor parents. Rich families do not decide that some of their children will be poor and live in poverty. Some families simply do not have the means and have to deal with situations that they cannot control or that are forced upon them. Such is the case of native communities, for example.

There are some very specific recommendations highlighting the plight of women living in various places all over the country. This week we marked the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. The minister's answer coincided with this anniversary, making

it all the more outrageous that she did not take the trouble to announce anything at all to reduce poverty.

The House has reiterated its unanimous motion from 1989, which was never implemented. The motion was brought forward again on November 22, 2009. The government and the House took it up, but the minister thumbed her nose at the opportunity given her by the Standing Committee on Human Resources to announce some measures. Her actions showed her contempt for all the work that has been done here.

I encourage my colleagues in the House to study this document sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, page by page. I have re-read it because I thought I must have made a mistake. It is 17 pages of coarse, outrageous remarks and propaganda. We have to connect the dots because there are political families. The senator who supervised the operation that the Conservatives are accused of using to circumvent the Canada Elections Act is the husband of the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development. People might wonder what the connection is. The answer to this question is just as serious as or even more serious than the misappropriation of funds because it involves all the people who are struggling in our society.

• (1550)

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many reasons to support this motion from our colleagues in the Bloc today.

However, I want to take advantage of my colleague from the human resources committee, the member for Chambly—Borduas who, along with myself and others, notably the member for Sault Ste. Marie and our chair from Niagara West—Glanbrook, who travelled across Canada and met with hundreds of witnesses representing thousands of people. He talked about poverty and homelessness, and really got a sense of just how desperate the lives are of so many Canadians who were helped so little by the stimulus package. Many of these people will now be asked to help repay, making their lives even worse.

He joined me earlier this week when we met with a number of faith leaders from Canada. Every faith community in the country is saying that it needs action on poverty. The faith leaders were as disappointed as we were in the minister's response to the poverty report that took three years to complete. My view of the response is that seldom has so much been written about so many things while saying so little.

It was not so much the response as it was the way the minister snuck it into the House. Usually when the government announces something, it announces it eight times. She did not even have a press conference or say a word. She snuck it into the desk in the House of Commons. What does that say about the government's approach to those Canadians who are truly vulnerable and need assistance from their government?

Business of Supply

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate our colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour for the tremendous work he is doing. We have been working together for some years now, and I know how concerned he is with justice.

His question allows me to go back to something. There is a sort of contempt here for parliamentary authorities. When someone responds that way to a job as exceptional as the one that we did, it is contemptuous. The work was done in the context of Canada's parliamentary institutions. Even though we have different opinions on the status of Quebec, we, the Bloc members, are respectful of Canadian institutions because we know that a country needs democratic institutions like these. When someone responds that way to such an exceptional job, done by members from all parties, it is contemptuous of the democratic institutions and the work that we have done.

• (1555)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked a lot about how he cares for people. I wonder if the member could outline for the House how he voted when we brought in a budget that reduced the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%.

He talked about caring for people who are having difficulties. I was in the riding of Markham—Unionville the other day cutting the ribbon for a new social housing project that was funded by this government for 245 low-income families.

The member from Nova Scotia talked about the economic stimulus program not helping families and individuals. I wonder if he could explain how he voted when we cut taxes by \$3,000 for the average family, how the member's party voted when we brought in a tax credit for tradespeople, when we brought in a tax credit for people with disabilities, when we brought in a tax credit for people who use transit, when we brought in a tax credit for people—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my Conservative colleague for his question because it allows me to illustrate the reason why we voted against this budget.

We see that this is an opportunity for them, even as we speak, to make huge cuts in social housing, renovation and improvement of social housing units, housing units for low-income seniors and disabled persons, housing units in the north and renovation of housing units for members of the first nations. The cuts add up to \$912 million. The Conservatives need to explain to us why they are continuing to slash social housing, when we know that the two biggest factors that make people poverty-stricken are the absence of housing—or of affordable housing—and employment insurance. Instead of him giving a big speech or showing off as he just did, I would have preferred to hear what he had to say about that. That would have been more practical.

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time there has been mention of the cynicism that

reigns within society. People are disillusioned and are increasingly abandoning politics.

In the last federal election, the voter turnout was only 58.8%, according to the Chief Electoral Officer. Thus, less than one-quarter of all voters elected the government. This is a very sad record, since we would need to go back to the 19th century to find a turnout so low.

This sad situation might be explained by a number of reasons. People may have the impression that politicians believe they are above the law, that politicians show a lot of partisanship and that they make misleading statements. Do you not find that this describes the Conservative government's actions very well?

The Bloc Québécois finds that this government's ideology is an affront to democracy. For the Conservative Party, the House of Commons is the equivalent of a monkey wrench stuck in the gears of the Conservative strategy, which aims only to keep the party in power. This shows its entire lack of respect for the principles that form the basis of our democracy.

Since the Conservatives came to power in 2006, a number of ministers have found themselves in embarrassing situations. Their exaggerated partisanship and their attempts to control information are the reasons for that.

On March 3, 2011, an employee of the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism used the public resources of his office. The minister's director of multicultural affairs mistakenly sent a member of the NDP a fundraising letter for a Conservative advertising campaign. The letter provided a detailed outline of the Conservatives' strategy, and we learned that only certain cultural communities were being targeted. The minister's government letterhead was used, which violates the rules.

The minister also adopts a client-centric approach although he is responsible for all newcomers. It is absolutely unacceptable. The Minister of Immigration has been mixed up in a number of cases that highlight this government's questionable strategy. A government certificate bearing the immense logo of the Conservative Party and sending an ultra-partisan email to a refugee defence agency can be added to the list of the minister's ideological actions. But the minister does not even have the courage to assume his responsibilities. He refuses to leave office and places the blame on his former employee.

In December 2010, the minister responsible for CIDA was asked a question in committee about who had altered a document coming from the agency. By adding the word “not”, someone had cancelled the decision made by officials to grant financing in the amount of \$7 million to the KAIROS organization. However, the minister admitted in February that she herself had altered the document in order to cancel the KAIROS financing.

This action reflects the Conservatives' lack of sensitivity towards the causes defended by this organization. But, more importantly, the minister lied to the committee and misled the representatives of the people. Since then, she has not been allowed by her one and only big boss, the Prime Minister, to answer any questions from the opposition. When she answers a question relating to this matter, she simply reads a memo from one of her assistants about the situation in another country. So she is just deflecting questions.

Business of Supply

The Speaker of the House said yesterday that the minister has violated parliamentary privilege. She may be declared to be in contempt of Parliament. This depends on the actions of the opposition in the coming days.

Regardless of how this case ends, it is the duty of every parliamentarian to denounce this reactionary behaviour. When members of the cabinet violate the rules of the House as she did, it only increases the cynicism felt towards politicians.

Late in 2010, public servants received a directive ordering them to replace “Government of Canada” with “Preparation H Government”. The Prime Minister is thus trying to show that he is the government and that he is the master of Parliament. How can we avoid comparing him to Big Brother, the omnipresent fictional character who rules the state? You might also feel that you are living in a storybook world of wizards, in which the state is run by a Government Who Must Not Be Named.

• (1600)

Some public administration experts make a parallel with King Louis XIV, who said “I am the State”. I should point out that Louis XIV reigned over France during the 17th and 18th centuries. This is what we call a regressive ideology.

While we are on the issue information monitoring and control, I must mention the obstruction by the Minister of Natural Resources and his lack of transparency. Back in October, one of the minister's assistants resigned—another one—when the media revealed that he had tried on three occasions to prevent the disclosure of government information. Around the middle of December 2010, we learned that two other assistants of the minister had also tried to block an authorized access to information request. While he was the Minister of Public Works, the minister's office impeded the disclosure of information on the asbestos issue and on the preparations for the U. S. president's visit, in 2009.

With these numerous cases of obstruction and lack of transparency, we can no longer talk about isolated incidents but, rather, a true culture of secrecy. The minister gives a lot of work to the Information Commissioner's investigators. We also have doubts about the minister's defence, who pleaded ignorance. This is yet another cabinet member who refused to resign despite those wrongdoings.

The circumvention of election campaign rules by the Conservatives is certainly the best example of the Conservative government's behaviour. This government will do anything to remain in office and to promote its partisan interests. A few days ago, the Federal Court of Appeal reversed the decision of the Federal Court, which supported the Conservatives' view on their election financing scheme. This issue dates back to 2006. To better understand its impact, I am going to mention the facts surrounding this controversy.

During the 2006 election campaign, the Conservative Party exceeded the spending limit by one million dollars. Four major Conservative organizers were involved in that illegal scheme, including two who are now senators. That is probably a prerequisite. I am referring to the in and out scheme used by the party's strategists. The Conservatives tried to circumvent the rules by involving local organizations in their calculations of election expenses to pay for

national ads. In 2007, the Conservative Party took Elections Canada to court. That takes some nerve. The arm's length body refused to pay back the election expenses claimed by 67 candidates, of which more than one third are Quebec candidates.

Last Tuesday's ruling supports Elections Canada's stand. The organization says that the Conservatives divided over \$1 million among candidates who had not yet reached their individual spending limit.

When it comes to spending limits, the Canada Elections Act is essential to the health of our democracy. It ensures a level playing field among candidates, so that money is not the overriding factor in an election campaign. However, as we know, the Conservatives are a little too fond of the American model. They would like to see the day when spending limits are abolished. Remember their attempts to abolish public financing for political parties, so as to muzzle opposition parties. In its decision, the Federal Court of Appeal points out on a number of occasions the Conservative Party's wrongdoings.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that this government has no intention of respecting the will of the people's representatives who are gathered in this House. There are a number of reasons to denounce the conduct of the government, namely: the unacceptable actions of several of its ministers; its self-promotion through government communications; the circumvention of the election rules by its party; and its blatant lack of transparency, despite putting its hand on its heart.

For these reasons, I am asking all members of this House to support the Bloc Québécois' motion.

• (1605)

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I want to congratulate my colleague on her excellent speech. I think she made a clear assessment of the Conservative government: its attitude and behaviour are anti-democratic and wrong and it stops at nothing to pursue this system of significant control that is centralist and bends the truth, as my colleague put it so well.

With regard to the lack of transparency and ethics, this government has shown that it is tops; it has been the Canadian champion for many years. If we go back in time a bit, we have the Liberals of course, but today we see to what extent this government tells lies. It is terrible to see how the privileges of duly elected members of the House are being limited. We are asking for simple documents, on Afghanistan or the F-35s, and the government refuses to produce those documents.

I would like my colleague to say a little more about the outrageous in and out electoral financing scheme.

Ms. France Bonsant: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his brilliant question.

During the 2006 election, a Conservative candidate ran against me. He was the first one to testify because of his conscience and values. I congratulated him on his honesty. Today, Mr. Caldwell can walk with his head held high.

Business of Supply

The most disgusting aspect of all this is that in 2005-06, we saw a Prime Minister promise, with his hand on his heart, that his government would be transparent, that it would be a government of the people, that it would be honest and would not do what the Liberals did. It was indeed different. Instead of taking 13 years to resort to propaganda and ideology, the Conservatives needed just two years. They are a bit cleverer than the Liberals but not cleverer than many citizens.

This government is not any better than the previous one.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, part of the contempt the government shows in the House of Commons is the attempt to keep documents not just from the members of Parliament but, by extension, keeping evidence and information that belongs to the people of Canada. We see that in the secret deal to buy jet fighters. Now we know that the real cost of this single-sourced jet fighter contract is \$30 billion for 65 planes. No wonder the Conservatives want to keep it secret, because the folks back home are saying that they are blowing \$30 billion on 65 planes and asking how did this group ever get to power. What are their priorities? Thirty billion dollars is more than the war in Afghanistan cost. It is more than the federal government gives to all the provinces for health care and it is going to blow that on 65 planes.

Why does my hon. colleague think that the government shows such contempt for the people of Canada by keeping this information secret and refusing to be accountable to the people of this country?

• (1610)

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant: Good grief, Mr. Speaker, I would have a hard time putting myself in the mind of a Conservative. I do not think I could do it.

If they are afraid to give this information, it is because they are lying. They fear the truth. They are afraid to tell it the way it is. When I watch them, I have the feeling I am in Texas where cowboys walk around pretending they are the greatest. That is their attitude. They despise democracy. They despise the Access to Information Act. It is obvious. They have been in government for five years and they have become champions of underhand dealings. Why are they not revealing this information? Because that is part of their culture. They need to conceal everything. I think lack of transparency is part of their DNA.

[English]

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons

I am rising today to address the motion moved by the hon. member for Joliette. Given the wide-ranging and far-fetched scope of this ridiculous motion, let me begin by addressing the first item.

As the Prime Minister and his parliamentary secretary have recently said in the House regarding election spending, this is an administrative dispute with Elections Canada that has been going on for five years. The dispute is whether certain expenses should be counted as local or national. There is a difference of opinion on this.

The Conservative Party of Canada acted under the law as it understood it at the time. When it was clear that Elections Canada had changed its interpretation of the law, the Conservative Party had already adjusted its practices in the 2008 election campaign. These were Conservative-raised dollars used for Conservative ads by Conservative candidates.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister also read into the record an email from the *Ottawa Citizen* of July 18, 2008 and I would like to read it into the record again. It stated:

Hi Phyllis, We are told by communications folks in BC that these were radio ads with the Candidate's personal tag on the end—therefore a local expense to be reported under the Candidate's expense ceiling, regardless of who pays. For rebate purposes, we were asked to bill each campaign—in the case of VanEast, \$2,612.00. The good news is that the Federal Party will transfer \$2,600 to the Federal Riding Association as we agreed to pay for the ads. We hope that you are able to squeeze this in under the ceiling. Some expenses are not considered election expenses subject to spending limits, such as fundraising costs. Please have a look at the totals and get back to us if you think we have a problem.

That was signed by the federal party bookkeeper. That was not an email from the Conservative Party, but an internal email from the New Democratic Party. The Phyllis referred to in the email was Phyllis Loke, the official agent to the NDP MP for Vancouver East. They were both involved in a transfer of funds that mirrored the practice in question that the Conservative Party engaged in for advertising purposes.

The email I read is one from the NDP national party bookkeeper, one Lucy Ladouceur. She sent it. It meets all the same characteristics that the Conservative transactions did. It was in fact filed with Elections Canada and we obtained it from Elections Canada through the Access to Information Act.

As John Robson from the *Ottawa Citizen* said at the time:

The more I watch this stuff...the more convinced I am that if there's a scandal here, it doesn't involve the Tories. But nobody seems to care. The opposition want a scandal, the press want a scandal...let's not bore ourselves with details...

Let us also see what another supporter of the opposition said. Robin Sears, a long-time adviser to the Liberal MP for Toronto Centre, also a long-time New Democrat, had this to say on CTV News Channel on February 25:

It's a load of nonsense—the guys at Elections Canada have a few bricks short of a load. Every party plays games with moving money around, have always done, will always do. What's a national ad, what's a local ad? It's nonsense. It's time we got back to things Canadians care about.

I am surprised to find myself in agreement with a staunch NDPer like Robin Sears, but he has hit the nail on the head with his comments and it is proof that this motion by the Bloc Québécois is absolutely ridiculous. This government is prioritizing the interests of Canadians while the Bloc is playing partisan politics on the taxpayers' dime.

[Translation]

While the Bloc is using its precious time in the House to launch partisan attacks on the government, we remain focused on the priorities of Canadians.

Business of Supply

Even though there are many encouraging signs that the global economy is recovering, that recovery remains very fragile. That is why our government continues to focus on employment and various other measures to ensure that our economy comes out of the recession stronger than ever. This is not the time to trigger a useless, opportunistic and expensive election.

● (1615)

[*English*]

Canadians expect and deserve to have us focus on their priorities, the economy. The economic upturn in Canada is driven by growth in consumer spending and residential investment which is primarily stimulated by fiscal and monetary policies as well as an improved labour market with a strong revival in consumer confidence. This means sound fiscal management and creating high-quality jobs.

As announced in budget 2010, which I note the Bloc Québécois did not support, our government has a three point strategy designed to return to a budgetary balance. First, we are committed to following through on the second year of the economic action plan. Second, we will build jobs and growth for tomorrow's economy through targeted measures. Finally, we will bring Canada's finances back to balance over the medium term.

[*Translation*]

This government is getting the job done for Canadians. We are creating jobs and encouraging growth by successfully completing the second year of our economic action plan. The 2010 budget offers more than \$19 billion to stimulate the economy during the second year of our economic action plan. Of that amount, approximately \$1.6 billion will improve benefits to unemployed Canadians, including long-tenured workers who are unemployed. We also invested \$1 billion to increase training opportunities for all Canadian workers because we believe in creating highly skilled jobs.

[*English*]

We are making sure unemployed workers have benefits for them and their families until they find jobs again. We are investing time and money into creating jobs for these workers. We are helping them develop skills so they can latch onto future career opportunities.

We are not making up outrageous, misleading, partisan motions like the Bloc Québécois is, which wants to ignore the priority of Canadians and Quebecers, which is, of course, the economy. The Bloc's goal is a costly, unnecessary and opportunistic election. We will not be sidetracked by its games.

This government understands the difficult economic times that Canadians are facing and we are standing by, ready to help. We are doing all this while those in the Liberal-led coalition are worrying about their own jobs and trying to force an election.

Let us not forget that early in the recession we provided an extra five weeks of EI regular benefits to all workers across the country and in regions with high unemployment we increased the maximum number of weeks of benefits from 45 to 50 weeks.

[*Translation*]

Our government also allows long-tenured workers who are unemployed to receive additional regular employment insurance

benefits. Since these men and women often only held one type of employment for many years, they now need more time to transition to a new job during this period of economic recovery. The payment of regular employment insurance benefits to long-tenured workers has been extended from 5 to 20 weeks. This additional support gives long-tenured workers more time to find employment during this period of economic recovery.

Our government also put in place the Fairness for the Self-Employed Act, which extends special employment insurance benefits to the self-employed on a voluntary basis. In January 2011, 2.6 million self-employed Canadians became eligible for special employment insurance benefits. Increasing access to these benefits is a good sound family policy that shows our government's commitment to helping families and making their needs a priority.

The government is also helping older workers who have been laid off to transition to new jobs. We have allocated an additional \$60 million to the targeted initiative for older workers, which is designed to help unemployed workers between the ages of 55 and 64.

With regard to young Canadians, we have invested \$60 million for the year ahead to help them during this period of economic recovery.

● (1620)

[*English*]

While the Bloc Québécois wishes that we would just forget about all of these Quebec needs, it is wasting valuable time in this place putting forward this ridiculous motion.

The Bloc has used today as an opportunistic occasion to make reckless, irresponsible and unsubstantiated partisan attacks toward a government that has done nothing but successfully respond to the needs of everyday Canadians over the past five years.

[*Translation*]

Employment and economic growth remain this government's main priority and we want to stay on course. Our economic action plan is achieving positive results and providing support measures that are key to our economy. As we said before, the economic action plan has allowed us to create close to 460,000 new jobs since July 2009.

[*English*]

We are focused on jobs for Canadians while the opposition is focused on their own jobs and calling an unnecessary costly election.

Business of Supply

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, concerned about the astonishing number of 80,000 seniors living under the poverty line in Quebec, the Canadian Labour Congress and the Quebec Federation of Labour—the FTQ—have launched their worry-free retirement campaign, aimed at providing a secure retirement for everyone. The elderly are in a vulnerable position and are too often left to their fate. The government should take some real measures to help them.

The government should make it a priority to help the elderly, increase old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits, and provide better protection for pensioners in order to improve the conditions in which seniors live.

The hon. member who spoke before me delivered a fine speech. She spoke about several classes in society, but she forgot the elderly. They were our builders, our pioneers. On the north shore, whether in Sept-Îles, Baie-Comeau, Havre-Saint-Pierre or communities all over the lower north shore, government assistance is needed to increase old age security and the guaranteed income supplement.

Ms. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc Québécois was not listening to my speech. I spoke a lot about the seniors we have helped with our economic action plan. I also wonder whether he is really up to date on what the Conservative government has done for Quebec.

I would like to take advantage of this opportunity, therefore, to tell him about some good things that have happened thanks to our commitment to Canadian and Quebec families. We gave Quebec a seat at UNESCO. We recognized that Quebecers form a nation within a united Canada. We have been supportive of the infrastructure priorities of the towns and cities of Quebec and have celebrated its history and culture, including the celebrations of the 400th anniversary of Quebec City.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Ms. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, you can see she is speaking quite loudly. I hope she will keep quiet—

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Questions and comments.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, when a member of another party says that someone is lying in this House, I would expect that the member would be given an opportunity to correct what he or she said and that the member would apologize.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Shelly Glover: This is just dishonourable behaviour. I would ask that the Speaker ask the member—

• (1625)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. There is a lot of discussion and comments going back and forth.

An. hon. member: I never heard it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order. There is a lot of talking and heckling both when the parliamentary secretary is speaking and when the Speaker is speaking.

[*Translation*]

I will give the floor briefly to the hon. member for Terrebonne-Blainville to clarify what she said, because the hon. parliamentary secretary heard something. I did not hear anything.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary said that the government had created 400,000 jobs with its recovery plan, while the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that the government had protected 135,000 jobs. That is not the same thing.

The Deputy Speaker: I am going to look at the transcript. If unparliamentary language was used, I will come back to the House on this issue.

[*English*]

I did not hear anything. The member for Terrebonne—Blainville is indicating that she did not use unparliamentary language. I will check the record and come back to the House if necessary.

On that note, hon. members are not doing themselves or the chamber any favours by heckling and yelling back and forth on both sides of the House while members are trying to answer a question, pose a question, or give a speech.

We have enough time for one more question or comment. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about the in and out issue here. A larger issue that voters may want to know about is that of third party advertising, where groups were encouraged to give large sums of money to support Conservative candidates across the country, which created a massive uneven playing field. If that does not violate the law, it certainly violates it in spirit.

Given the member's current position, does she not think that one of the government's top priorities has to be a plan to get back to balanced budgets? The Liberal Party did that when we were in power. Would the member not agree that her government should lay out to the Canadian public a deficit reduction plan to get the country's finances back into a surplus as soon as possible?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, we have laid out a plan to bring back balanced budgets. We are moving forward with the next phase of our economic action plan. The budget that is coming on March 22 is designed to do exactly that. It will focus on bringing us back into balance. It will focus on restraint. We will continue to create jobs and maintain those jobs that are so very important to our families.

I know what will not help. Raising taxes will not help. We cannot raise the GST by 2%, impose an iPod tax, or raise the corporate tax rate from 16.5% to 18% as the Liberals propose. We cannot afford a carbon tax, as proposed by the Liberal Party. This would damage our families and our economy.

I will stand up for families with this next phase of the economic action plan.

Business of Supply

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We have vigorous debates in the House and from time to time things get out of hand. I would ask the hon. member to please retract the statement she just made, because she just gave a long diatribe of complete untruths to the House and to the Canadian public. I will give her a chance to retract her statement.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair is not going to make a ruling on the interpretation of facts. Members have disagreements on the facts all the time. We will move on.

Resuming debate. The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must say I am overjoyed to be able to join in on the spirited debate we are having today.

I will take a different approach to what some of my other colleagues in the House have been doing with their remarks, in that I will try to explain more clearly to the Canadian public who may be watching this debate what is happening here and the motivation behind the motion that we have before us today.

Primarily, another element that has not really been discussed is we will be voting on this motion tonight. That is relevant and I will get to that in a moment.

Of course the motion itself, as anyone who has taken time to participate in or to listen to the debate today undoubtedly knows, is so over the top, so inflammatory, it was done for a purpose. It was done to try and score some cheap political points. That is okay. All political parties do that from time to time.

What we see as well is that we are actually having a vote on the motion tonight. Why that is relevant is that normally, the Bloc Québécois does not want to have votes on Thursday evenings. If it has an opposition day motion on a Thursday, it normally defers the vote to the following week. The reason it is having the vote tonight is that next week is a constituency week and perhaps, if one believes the rumours, the last week before an impending election. The Bloc is using the vote tonight, where the coalition parties I am sure will vote in favour of the motion, so that the Bloc members can go back to their ridings in Quebec and say that Parliament condemned the government for the Bloc's conduct. The Bloc members can use this for politically partisan reasons. However, all they will be doing is using this motion to try and enhance their own political well-being, and that is okay. Other parties do that. I am not begrudging them the fact that they want to do this.

However, I have a few suggestions for my colleagues from the Bloc. If in fact next week they will be out campaigning and getting ready for what they believe might be an election to be called perhaps as early as the following week, I have a few suggestions of some of the things they may want to discuss with their constituents.

Their constituents may want to hear what plans the Bloc has to form a coalition government if the opportunity were to arise. We know that at its recent convention in Quebec there was a resolution passed where Bloc members said that they would entertain and actually involve themselves in a coalition government if the

opportunity were to arise. It would be incumbent upon themselves to spell out the details of what that exactly means.

We do have a bit of history on this. As we all know, shortly after the results were known of the 2008 election, the Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois entered into a formal coalition agreement. We all saw the pictures on television where the three party leaders at that time got together, signed a little document, shook hands, stood before Canadians and said, "We are prepared to form a coalition government". The former leader of the Liberal Party said, "I am prepared to lead this new coalition government".

We all know what happened shortly thereafter. Canadians were so outraged at the very thought that a coalition government could try and rush the power away from a duly elected government that the coalition quickly fell apart.

However, since the Bloc Québécois is now talking about entering into a new coalition government should the opportunity arise, I would like those members to explain to the House, as well as their own constituents, what the relationships would be.

Let us go back to 2008. We know what the Bloc said at the time. It said it did not want to have any members in cabinet, but it would have the right to veto.

Let us talk about this for a minute. What exactly does that mean? What does a right to veto mean? Does that mean if the Bloc Québécois did not see anything in the new coalition government legislation that benefited it personally, the Bloc could veto that and the legislation would be no more? How can a government be run like that?

Here is what I find confusing. The *raison d'être* of the Bloc Québécois apparently is to separate from Canada. On one hand it came into this Parliament over 20 years ago saying that its *raison d'être* was to separate, to promote the cause of separation in Quebec. On the other hand, it is now saying that it is willing to enter into a coalition government to govern Canada.

• (1630)

Perhaps someone from the Bloc Québécois side can explain to me how it could be promoting separation, yet, at the same time, promoting coalition governments to govern the country it wishes to separate from. It makes absolutely no sense to me. I would very much like to hear—

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I fail to see what anything the member has said has to do with the Bloc motion before us. I would ask you to call the member to order and direct the member to direct his comments toward the motion on the floor today.

• (1635)

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair has reminded members in the past and earlier today that, while their remarks may stray somewhat from time to time, the bulk of their remarks should address the motion that is before the House.

Business of Supply

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, again, as I pointed out earlier, the reason I am speaking about this is this is exactly the motivation behind the motion. This is not anything more than a very superficial attempt to try to embarrass the government for its own political purposes. That is why the motion was brought forward.

If that is not germane to the motion, I do not know what is. How can we not argue that the motivation is critical when debating the motion before us?

An hon. member: Because it is fictional.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: It certainly is, Mr. Speaker, and I will continue my remarks in that vein.

I know the member from the NDP does not want me to remind Canadians about the ill-thought out, ill-conceived coalition agreement that took place after the 2008 election. I know the member does not want me to remind Canadians that the NDP will probably be a willing partner in a new coalition agreement should the opportunity arise. However, the reality is that is what the Bloc has stated it would be prepared to do.

We have not quite heard the views from the other opposition parties on the matter, but I have not heard anyone say that they are against it either.

However, on the point where the Bloc Québécois is coming from, while, on one hand, it condemns the government, on the other hand, it says that it wants to enter into an agreement with other coalition partners to perhaps govern the country in which it loses an election.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. You just pointed out that the motion being debated today must be the core of members' statements in the House. The parliamentary secretary has just said that he wanted to talk about the motivation of the Bloc bringing it forward. That is a side issue and his entire speech has been on that and not on the actual substance of the motion.

I would ask you to remind the member again that the majority of his comments are to be the substance of the motion, not his psychobabble about what may or may not be the motivation in bringing forward the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine is making a good point. The member has been speaking for almost nine minutes. It is time for his remarks to come more to the substance of the motion and not to stray into hypothetical situations. I find it is irrelevant to the motion before the House. If he could address the remainder of his remarks to the substance of the motion, I think the House would appreciate it.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I will use the remaining time, short as it may be, to address one of the elements of the motion before us, and that is, the so-called in and out scheme.

As we all know, anyone who has studied this process of transferring money between national and local campaigns recognizes very quickly that the first party in Parliament to use the technique was the Bloc Québécois. Its members are the fathers and the mothers of the in and out. I find it passing strange to say the least that the Bloc would now complain that our government should be

condemned or should be somehow censored for doing the very techniques it used in the 2004 and 2006 elections.

Everyone knows we have a dispute with Elections Canada. However, we have heard time and time again, over the past few days in question period, examples of how all political parties, including the Bloc Québécois, have used the same in and out money transfer between national and local campaigns.

It is more than passing strange. It almost hypocritical that the Bloc would condemn the government for using a technique which it invented.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague summed up his speech quite well, with the mantra of Elections Canada regarding the in and out. He used the term “passing strange”. Elections Canada saw something passing by that was quite strange and therefore investigated it and made charges.

The hon. member talked about the coalition and he is right. There is a history of this. In 2005, a press conference was called with the Prime Minister, the then leader of the opposition, and the other parties. The history is his. Therefore, the Conservatives can write the book, and that too is passing strange.

I will get back to the issue of the in and out scandal. The hon. member insists that money passed in and passed out in each particular case. However, what is most germane to this conversation is the visitations of local authorities. They showed up at the Conservative Party headquarters, not at our or other opposition party headquarters.

Could the member comment on the fact that other members of the Conservative Party have publicly said that they refuse to get involved in this issue?

●(1640)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I am glad we had comments and a question from my colleagues over in the Liberal area. When we are talking about scandals, I do not think we can talk very long without going back to the mother of all scandals, which is of course the sponsorship scandal. It was proven, not alleged, that members of the Liberal Party pocketed taxpayer dollars, put them into Liberal bank accounts, stealing money from the Canadian taxpayer through the sponsorship program. That is not an allegation. That is rock solid proof.

If the member truly wants to enhance and elevate the level of debate on today's motion, he should merely stand, or at least one of his colleagues who has more knowledge of the sponsorship scandal, and tell Canadians where the forty million bucks are.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, listening to the Conservative and Liberal Parties accuse each other of corruption is like listening Bugsy Siegel and Al Capone trying to find out which one of them stole more from each other in the 1930s.

Business of Supply

The bottom line is the Conservative government transferred money in and out for the purpose of avoiding legal spending limits, and that is the difference. The Conservative government continues to stand and say that it transferred money in and transferred money out and other parties did it as well. Other parties did do it because that was legal. What is not legal is to do it for the purpose of avoiding a national spending limit.

When the Conservatives hit their \$18 million ceiling nationally in 2006, they transferred money to local campaigns to pay for national ads, therefore exceeding national spending limits by a further \$1 million. That is why they have been charged.

If the other parties had done the same thing as the Conservatives, why is it only the Conservative Party officials from the 2006 campaign that find themselves charged and facing a year in jail or \$25,000 fines?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, that is a question we keep asking Elections Canada. We would like to know that as well. In 2004 every party engaged in identical transactions between national and local campaigns, every party and everyone was in compliance with the electoral law in 2004.

In 2006 similar practices occurred, but it was not until following the conclusion of the 2006 election that Elections Canada said that it had examined the law regarding the transfers between national and local campaigns, that it had reinterpreted the law and that it had determined that perhaps the Conservative Party might be in violation.

Had Elections Canada informed all parties of its new interpretation of the law, prior to the 2006 election, perhaps we would not be in the situation today. We have said fully that we readjusted our practice before the 2008 election to comply with the new interpretation of Elections Canada because we finally got some guidance as to its expectations. Unfortunately, it did not do that before the 2006 election.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: 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 member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, Taxation; the member for Gatineau, Democratic Reform.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to discuss the motion that we moved this morning. First, I would like to say that I will share the time I have with the member for Outremont.

Contrary to what the member for Saint-Boniface says, it was not rhetoric that we included in this morning's motion. We ourselves did not decide that the Conservative Party had violated the Elections Act and the Access to Information Act. Nor did we decide ourselves that the government had broken the law when it came to telling the House the truth.

We moved this motion because we had proof and because the Speaker of the House himself showed us yesterday that, in two of these cases, we had reason to doubt the accuracy of what we were told in the House.

As for election fraud, it has been proven that even Conservative members from Quebec made claims for amounts of money that belonged to the people of Quebec, because these members represented Quebec. They were not entitled to the money they received to run in the election. Because they were not entitled, they should have to give it back.

We are not the ones who decided this; it was the appeal court. I think that the appeal court judges are smart enough to know the difference between election fraud and an in and out transfer. The member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre tried to make us believe that all of the other parties took advantage of the same scheme, but I must point out that we never submitted false invoices and we did not request any refunds from the Chief Electoral Officer. That is why we were not accused of anything. What we did was legal. The Conservatives are under investigation because what they did was illegal.

I would also like to remind members of some rather comical incidents. If we look back, we should have seen this coming. We should have already been thinking that something was not right about what the Prime Minister was telling us when he was in the opposition. For example, on June 18, 2004, LCN reported that the Conservative leader had adopted a brand new slogan to appeal to Quebecers: “Un gouvernement propre au Québec”, while the slogan of the Bloc Québécois was “Un parti propre au Québec”. Already, the Prime Minister was confused and was trying to use our good idea for himself.

On another occasion, he also said that he thought people should elect a cat person because if you elect a dog person, you elect someone who wants to be loved. If you elect a cat person, you elect someone who wants to serve. He said that in an interview with Kevin Newman on *Global National* on April 5, 2006. He could have also said that if you elect a cat person, you elect someone who likes to serve himself.

And even before he destroyed everything that was happening at Status of Women Canada and before he destroyed the hopes of women in this country and in Quebec, Andrée Côté, the director of legislative reform at the National Association of Women and Law, which had to shut down because its funding was cut, wrote this on January 18, 2007:

● (1645)

Exactly one year ago, to the day, January 18, 2006, in the midst of an election campaign, [the Prime Minister] declared:

“Yes, I'm ready to support women's human rights and I agree that Canada has to do more to meet its international obligations to women's equality. If elected I will take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women.”

On the federal election date of January 23, 2006, his party was elected to office. In spite of its minority government status, the government was quick to set in motion a series of policy decisions that have sent a resounding message, namely: that women's equality and the promotion and protection of their human rights is not of concern to this government.

To finish up with the anecdotes, I would like to remind the members that it was also said that by refusing to testify before the Standing Committee on Public Safety, the member for Beauce and the members of this government were trampling on the foundations of ministerial accountability and parliamentary democracy:

Business of Supply

And above all else, they are violating the formal commitments they made during their 2006 election campaign. “The time for accountability has arrived,” declared the Prime Minister on page 1 of his party's election platform. It seems that that time has come and gone.

I have another quote from the Prime Minister who, as Leader of the Opposition, told the Montreal newspaper *The Gazette* the following, the year before he came to power:

[*English*]

Information is the lifeblood of a democracy. Without adequate access to key information about government policies and programs, citizens and parliamentarians cannot make informed decisions, and incompetent or corrupt governance can be hidden under a cloak of secrecy.

When he became Prime Minister, his attitude appeared to undergo a shift of considerable proportions.

According to Lawrence Martin in *The Politics of Control*, “It often took the Conservatives twice as long as previous governments to handle access requests. Sometimes it took six months to a year”.

[*Translation*]

Moving on, I would like to refer to the director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, Kevin Gaudet, who has said there should be an investigation to determine whether the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism routinely misused government resources to win votes.

I believe our motion clearly describes the facts as I just listed them in this House. We did not conjure this motion completely out of thin air. We thought about it very carefully and reflected on it after a series of indisputable facts that we have listed and that I could continue to list for several minutes.

Of course we are going to ask all members of this House, or at least all opposition members, to vote in support of our motion. In closing, I would like to remind the member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre that in 2005, the Prime Minister himself wanted to sign and then did sign a letter to form a coalition with the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. If a coalition can work for him, it can work for others, too.

• (1650)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for that woman from the Bloc Québécois. She does her part to deliver speeches for women, vulnerable women in particular.

I wonder whether she could tell me how she sees us advancing as women here in this House. Two of her female colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, who are presently here in this House, are being quite vicious in their comments toward other women in this House. I will not stoop to their level, but nevertheless, I wonder how we can advance as women if we are unable to support one another here.

This motion to divide the government and our country aside, I am asking the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois whether she will rise today to say she will work with me and the other women in this House to prevent women from treating each other the way they did here 15 minutes ago.

• (1655)

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer the hon. member's question.

I would say to her that in a democracy, we are entitled to our opinions. I would add that if she cannot stand the heat, then she should stay out of the kitchen.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the thrust of the debate in the House for some time now has been an assessment of the integrity, the honesty, the openness, the transparency and the accountability of the government.

I wonder if the member would care to comment on the reaction of the Conservatives to the Speaker's ruling where they seem to suggest that they will see what they can give us and maybe come up with some other reasons as to why they should not disclose the information that has been requested by the finance committee. It would appear that they are still fighting a Speaker's ruling on the rights and privileges of Parliament.

The Conservative government, obviously, is not a government that is here to govern in the best interests of the public.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

I think he should not be surprised by the government's reaction to the Speaker's ruling. As always, we are dealing with a government that does not respect Speaker's rulings. As we know, we are still waiting for certain documents to do with Afghan detainees and we are still waiting for documents to do with everything we are asking about in this House. Nonetheless, we never get an answer. I am not surprised.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the situation before us were not so serious, it would be quite amusing to watch the so-called law and order party using the cheap defence lines of every crook that has ever walked the planet.

We are dealing with misleading the House. We are dealing with a minister who perjured herself in committee and forged documents. We are also dealing with a criminal investigation into a money laundering scheme. Now that some Conservatives are up on criminal charges, the government is doing the classic “whoa, whoa officer do not pick on me. Everybody is doing it”. If they had any evidence that people were doing it they should have given it to the police, but they did not. They are the ones who are busted.

When that does not stick, they claim that their elaborate scheme to funnel money through ridings to get kickbacks for local riding associations was an administrative error. I know so many guys in prison and I have never heard one of them say that they were guilty. It was always an error. Folks back home who go before Revenue Canada and claim that it was an administrative error will get the book thrown at them.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I do not know how the member for Laval heard the question with all that chatter going back and forth but I will give her a chance to respond.

Business of Supply

The hon. member for Laval.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, indeed, I did not understand the question, but I presume it had to do with the answers we are getting from the government.

I would say to the hon. member that I am not surprised that we are getting these answers from the government. We always get the same answers to the same questions.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a debate on our democratic institutions. The Bloc Québécois has brought forward a motion that we will support. This motion sets out, one by one, the events, most of which occurred recently, that show just how far the current Conservative government will go to sabotage our country's democratic institutions.

Let us start with the fundamental principle of democracy, namely, a free election process in which each person has the right to seek office. As soon as individuals are able to vote, they have the right to seek office and the rules must be the same for everyone. Each person seeking office is allowed to spend a fixed amount. There is an electoral law that covers all of this. The person responsible for administering this law, the Chief Electoral Officer, is an impartial, highly respected person who deserves our respect.

What happened in this famous case of the false invoices submitted by the Conservatives? They devised a scheme wherein they were able to get a rebate for what they claimed were local expenses when it was not. As a result of this scheme, they were able to obtain over \$30,000 for a riding like Hull—Aylmer, which had legitimate expenditures of only some \$15,000. That is why it was illegal. That is why what the Conservatives did has nothing to do with the other parties. The other parties' local expenses are legal and recognized.

The police went to the Conservatives' office, but that did not stop them from complaining. They said that the police were wrong, that the crown prosecutors were wrong, that everyone was wrong, except them. However, the highest federal court, the Federal Court of Appeal, has just handed down a unanimous decision that the Conservative Party, the governing party, was wrong and that the scheme was illegal. The charges laid may result in jail time for some people. This is serious because it erodes public trust and undermines the ability of our institution to function democratically. It also influences the outcome of an election. If they have the right to spend more than the other parties and they also illegally fill their coffers with taxpayers' money, the rules no longer apply equally to all.

Another matter is mentioned. A minister went before a parliamentary committee and said that senior public officials, high-level bureaucrats, told her that they believed KAIROS should not receive funding. Therein lies the problem. No one is questioning a minister's right to make decisions about how public money will be spent, or how she make decisions based on criteria established by others. That is not the issue here. She said that the officials told her to say no to KAIROS. That part was false. A document was doctored. For that reason, the Speaker found the government to be at fault.

We should remember that the current Speaker of the House of Commons is the longest-serving Speaker in the history of Canada.

He is held in such high regard, that this is the second time he has served as speaker for a government formed by a political party other than his own. There can be no doubt about his neutrality.

Yet, time after time, whenever they are not pleased with something, the Conservatives go on the attack. They attacked the Chief Electoral Officer. I remember asking him questions after the Conservatives attacked him. They suggested that they were the victims. The House heard the speech made a little earlier by the member for Saint Boniface. The Conservatives are always the victims of plots made against them by everyone. They are innocent victims. Unfortunately, they are not the victims. They are the ones committing the offence. That is what we are talking about here. It does not prevent them from blaming the Chief Electoral Officer and going so far as to say that these rules only apply to them. In fact, what only applies to them is the scheme that they set up to give precedence to their partisan interests over public interests. According to them, the ends always justify the means, even if it means cheating, bending the rules and not respect our democratic institutions. That is the art of the Conservatives.

• (1700)

The 2006 election resulted in our second consecutive minority government. In 2008, we had our third one, which is unique in Canadian history. The Conservatives have no intention of stopping there. They will do anything to get a majority. That is their one and only goal, even if it means cheating on election rules. That is what we have in front of us: a government which, through its repeated actions, is undermining the public's trust in our democratic institutions. That is why the New Democratic Party is going to support the Bloc Québécois' motion.

• (1705)

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, once again, the hon. member has put his finger on the objective of the Bloc Québécois motion. This clearly demonstrates that we are now debating some important values. And the values on this side are not the same as those on the other side.

If we look at what is happening on the other side, we see a policy of secrecy, as our colleague was saying. We see a reduction in the privileges of the elected members of this House. We see theft, for they have been found guilty of theft by means of the in and out system. We see manipulation of the truth. This is unacceptable for members who should be legitimately receiving necessary information. We see a failure to respect this institution and all the institutions, and the various committees of the House of Commons. And then they come and tell us, at every meeting we have, that this government is the very embodiment of transparency and ethics.

It quite plainly is not. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about the undemocratic behaviour and attitude of this government.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, one of the main functions of a Parliament, in our system of government, is to oversee government spending. Unlike the American system, where there is watertight separation between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, here the executive also sits in the cabinet, but they come back here. Together, we all have to decide on how public resources are spent.

Business of Supply

The Conservatives had the nerve to say that once something has been studied in cabinet, it becomes a secret and they would speak no more about it. This was an absurdity which obviously was nullified yesterday by the courageous ruling of our Speaker. However that will not prevent them from persisting. The games started again in front of the microphones three seconds later. This is a lack of respect for our democratic institutions. It crosses party lines. It affects all Canadians, and it is now affecting Canada.

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my hon. colleague's speech and I did not hear him refer to the comments made by Mr. Robin Sears. His remarks were mentioned several times here today, in fact I mentioned them myself earlier today.

I would like to inform the member, because he may not have been here when I was speaking earlier, that I actually had a personal conversation with Mr. Robin Sears. Mr. Robin Sears is a former national campaign director of the New Democratic Party. He told me that the New Democratic Party did exactly this. It was not just transferring funds from the local level to the national level and back and forth. It was actually transferring funds from the national level to the local level for the purposes of advertising during election campaigns.

I am prepared to swear an affidavit about the comments and the discussions I had with Mr. Sears. I will say clearly what he told me, which is that the New Democratic Party has for many years done exactly what was done in the case we are talking about today.

I wonder if that member would like to comment on those comments.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Listen intently to this, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Immigration took government property. He thinks it has to do with pieces of paper. Again today in the House he said that he only took a dozen pieces of paper and that he would give \$10 back for that. That was the problem.

As if that was the problem, instead of the fact that in his ministerial office, with his ministerial staff, on government property and on government time, he was shilling for his political party with the very groups his office is supposed to help in applying the law. It is about suborning the institutions that we are all here to serve.

With regard to the lobbyist he just talked about, if he knows anything he should do the same thing that happened to his party, which is to take it to the police. However, he will not do that because there is only one party in the House of Commons that has broken the law and it is the Conservative Party.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we say that we are proud to stand in this House because this is the House of Commons and the House of Commons is the House of the people of Canada. Unfortunately, however, what we are dealing with in this debate today is that the present regime has decided to undermine and show contempt for the people of Canada through secrecy, through misrepresentation of facts, through perjury at committees, and ministerial roles, to take roles that are supposed to be there to represent all the people and use them as the private stash

of the Conservative Party. They are up on criminal charges. A minister has been found in contempt of this House.

However, we cannot blame the poor little staffers that the Conservatives throw to the bus every week when someone gets caught. I am not even blaming the hapless minister. The Prime Minister himself has put his imprimatur on every single thing in this regime and it is time the Prime Minister was held accountable .

Let us look at the Conservatives' behaviour in the in and out scandal. They are acting like every busted crook who has ever walked the planet. They did not do anything wrong. They just have a dispute with the prosecutor. Every guy going to jail has a dispute with the prosecutor.

The people back home need to understand what the Conservatives were doing here. This was an elaborate scheme cooked up by the leaders of the Conservative Party to launder money. They took money from the central campaign and they filtered it quickly through some deadbeat campaign in the middle of Palookaville, Manitoba. Then they got the money back immediately to buy national ads because they were trying to get around the democratically enforced election spending limits.

We now hear them say that everybody did this. That is the other line that all crooks use when they get caught. Everybody wants to know why they are the ones being picked out. There is always a conspiracy as to why they are the poor people caught out. They are the only ones up on charges.

However, this was not just a money laundering scheme. The Conservatives show their contempt by taking the two key buddies who made this and they put them in the Senate. Senator Doug Finley sits there for life. Senator Gerstein is a bagman.

The Conservatives told the people of Canada that they would clean up, that they would do something different. What do they do? They put bagmen and party hacks, like Senator Housakos, in the other house that is supposed to have sober second thought. That line is kind of a misnomer. The Conservatives are using taxpayer money to fund their operation.

Not only did they get caught on this in and out scheme and not only has the Federal Court ruled it quite appropriately as a scheme, but the other piece of the puzzle here was that they enticed local ridings to get kickbacks.

I have many friends who are Conservatives and many Conservatives are honest and they refused to participate. We have Conservative candidates who stood up and said that they would not participate in that illegal action. However, the other ones were enticed by the kickback. Because they flowed the money through their bank accounts and took it out, the local riding association was able to go to the taxpayer of Canada to claim receipts that it was not eligible for. Maybe it raised only \$9,000 or \$10,000 in a campaign but then it walked out with a cheque for \$30,000. Even the mob could not give that kind of return on an investment. This is what caught them out. They thought they were flying high. This is exactly like something we would see in Panama.

Business of Supply

All these dead dog riding associations that could hardly even find candidates to run, started asking for the kickback they were entitled to. Elections Canada looked at it and said that it was a criminal act.

Canadians look to government to set a certain standard but what do they find with the government? Whenever the government is accused and it needs to do the right thing, it refuses to stand up and be accountable. It hides the evidence. It prorogues and shuts down. It attacks Elections Canada. It is time the government was held—

• (1710)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

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 Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 202*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Andrews	Angus
Ashton	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Beaudin	Bélangier
Bellavance	Bennett
Bigras	Blais
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brisson
Brunelle	Byrne
Cannis	Cardin
Carrier	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Coady	Coderre
Cotler	Crombie
Crowder	Cullen
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Desnoyers
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dion
Donnelly	Dorion
Dryden	Duceppe
Dufour	Duncan (Etobicoke North)

Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Easter
Eyking	Faille
Folco	Foote
Freeman	Gagnon
Gameau	Gaudet
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Guay
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Hall Findlay	
Harris (St. John's East)	Holland
Hughes	Ignatieff
Jennings	Julian
Kania	Karygiannis
Kennedy	Laforest
Laframboise	Lamoureux
Lavallée	Layton
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemay	Leslie
Lessard	Lévesque
Malhi	Malo
Maloway	Marston
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	McCallum
McGuinity	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Ménard
Mendes	Minna
Mulcair	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Nadeau	Oliphant
Ouellet	Pacetti
Paillé (Hochelaga)	Paquette
Patry	Pearson
Plamondon	Pomerleau
Proulx	Rac
Rafferty	Ratansi
Regan	Rodriguez
Rota	Russell
Savage	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Siksay
Silva	Simms
Simson	St-Cyr
Stoffer	Szabo
Thi Lac	Thibault
Tonks	Trudeau
Vincent	Volpe
Wilfert	Wrzesnewskyj
Zarac — 145	

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Ashfield	Baird
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blackburn
Block	Boucher
Boughen	Braid
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Cadman
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casson
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Cummins
Davidson	Day
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Dykstra	Fantino
Fast	Finley
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Généreux	Glover
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hiebert
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	Jean

Private Members' Business

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Lemieux	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKenzie
Mayes	McLeod
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill-Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Paradis
Payne	Petit
Poilievre	Preston
Raitt	Rathgeber
Reid	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Scheer	Schellenberger
Shea	Shiple
Shory	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thompson
Tilson	Toews
Trost	Tweed
Uppal	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young— 135	

[Translation]

COMPETITION ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-452, An Act to amend the Competition Act (inquiry into industry sector), as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Speaker: There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ) moved that Bill C-452, An Act to amend the Competition Act (inquiry into industry sector), be concurred in at report stage.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Robert Vincent moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to take the floor in this third reading debate, which will wrap up the efforts of my political party and myself to convince the hon. members of the House of the merits of Bill C-452, An Act to amend the Competition Act (inquiry into industry sector), which continues to be a current concern. The bill would give the Competition Bureau the requisite powers to carry out its investigations.

The price of a barrel of oil was in free fall at one time, but because of the situation in Libya, the price shot up last week. The price of a barrel of oil has skyrocketed, and that has repercussions on prices at the pump. That is the problem.

The Competition Bureau could conduct an inquiry. Consumers are not clueless and they are not idiots. They are aware that the gasoline sitting in underground tanks at service stations was bought at a much cheaper price. Even if the price of a barrel of oil has risen to \$104 or \$120, there should be no direct increase at the pump because that gas cost much less. It is easier for the oil companies and service stations to raise the pump price as soon as there is an increase. People feel they are being taken hostage by the oil companies.

PAIRED

Members

Blaney	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)
Lalonde	Mourani
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)	Smith— 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed Bill S-13, An Act to implement the Framework Agreement on Integrated Cross-Border Maritime Law Enforcement Operations between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America, to which the concurrence of the House is desired.

[English]

It being 5:56 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's order paper.

Private Members' Business

I will give one concrete example. There is a Canadian Tire with a service station near where I live. On Tuesday, the price at 7 a.m. was \$1.17. Three hours later, at the same service station, it was \$1.25. What happened between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m.? I have no idea, but the price rose by 8¢. Twenty-four hours later, the price was back down to \$1.17. How does one explain to the population that the price of gas can fluctuate in 24 hours even though nothing has happened? The retailer has pocketed 8¢ a litre, and I think it is the consumers who lose out. That is why consumers want a bill so that the Competition Bureau can conduct inquiries into the petroleum sector.

When I speak of the petroleum sector, it is not just the price at the pump. We already know that when the price of a barrel of oil goes up, the cost of refining goes down, but the opposite happens as well. When the price of a barrel of oil goes down, the cost of refining goes up.

I asked that question of the Competition Bureau and in the committee. I was told that the oil companies do not talk to each other, but how can it be that every Monday, without having talked, all the refiners in Quebec and Canada have the same prices at the pump? If the refining price is set at 8¢, the following month it is 13¢, 15¢ or 16¢. We do not see a change in the price at the pump because the oil companies are different. That is what we think, but that is not the case. In fact, the oil companies all buy from the same place. The refiner's gas and the gas in the underground tanks at the service station come from the same place. So how can the refining price be the same?

● (1800)

There used to be one refinery in Montreal and one in Quebec City, but they were owned by two different companies. Yet, every Monday, the price at the refinery was the same. Consumers would expect that each Monday there will be a disparity between the two oil companies or brands at the gas stations.

How can the price be the same if they are not talking? How can the same litre of oil be refined at the same price? I asked the Competition Bureau that question, but it was confused and did not understand why the price was the same. I asked if it would investigate, but it said no. It claimed to have enough investigative powers. But what kind of investigative powers? Personally, I do not think that it has any. The bureau said that it had conducted an investigation in the Sherbrooke area and that it was able to prove that there was collusion among the oil companies to fix prices at the pump. But they needed an informant.

Someone had to phone the Competition Bureau and tell them he had received threats to force him to increase his price at the pump. That is when the Competition Bureau launched an investigation. In order to get an investigation going, someone must act as an informer. I tried it myself. The Competition Bureau said we could call to complain about the price of gas in our city or town, if it was higher than in the neighbouring city or town, and if we did not understand why gas was so expensive at the pump.

Many people in my riding complained to the Competition Bureau, asking for an investigation. However, it never did, because there was no whistle-blowing. The Competition Bureau was not provided with all the evidence required to start an investigation.

Do people know what competition means for oil companies? It is not competition between companies but, rather, between municipalities. If a municipality is large, gas will cost a lot more, because the population is much larger. Conversely, if a municipality located 10 kilometres away is much smaller, the price of gas will be much lower. Oil companies say that this is competition. People living in the larger municipality should fill up in the small town. That is what they call competition.

It goes even further. In Montreal, some streets are busy and the price at the pump is much higher than it is four or five blocks away, where there is less traffic. Again, that is what oil companies call competition. However, for consumers that is not competition, it is gouging.

We have to put gas in our car. Oil companies make billions of dollars in profits every year, but I think they take the money directly from our pockets. And I am not the only who thinks so. If one were to ask people from each and every riding in Canada whether they think they are getting taken by oil companies, I am sure their answer would be yes.

Is it so hard to give the Competition Bureau an investigative power? We often hear political parties wonder whether that is done elsewhere, and whether we would be the only ones to do so. The fact is that, at one time, the Competition Bureau had a power to investigate. It had it until 1986, when the Conservatives of the day came to office. They took that investigative power away from the Competition Bureau, and said it was because that industry had already been investigated.

● (1805)

An investigation can be carried out into any industry. We could also talk about the construction industry in Montreal, where there is talk that bids may have been rigged. The Competition Bureau can investigate; however, at present, it cannot do so on its own initiative. There has to be an informer. Because of this, pressure from industry lobbies resulted in the government of the day taking away the investigative powers of the Competition Bureau.

Do other countries have investigative powers like those we want to give to Canada's Competition Bureau? The answer is yes. In the United States, this type of study can be initiated in three ways: Congress uses its legislative authority to ask the Federal Trade Commission, the FTC, to draft a specific report; members of Congress or of a congressional committee, without using its legislative authority, ask the FTC to conduct a study; and the FTC initiates or conducts an investigation on its own. There are no formal criteria limiting what kind of research and policy inquiries the FTC can undertake.

We would also like to point out the situation that exists in the United Kingdom with the Office of Fair Trading.

The OFT has carried out market studies of various sectors of the economy, in particular liability insurance, new car warranties, private dentistry, taxi services, proprietary credit cards, and pharmacies.

Private Members' Business

...The OFT may also make a market investigation reference to the Competition Commission if there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that any feature, or combination of features, of a market prevents, restricts or distorts competition.

Hence, the United Kingdom can conduct its own investigations. Also, the European Union has the following provision:

When the trend of trade between member states, the rigidity of prices or other circumstances suggest that competition may be restricted or distorted within the common market, the Commission may conduct an inquiry...

Thus, the European Union can also initiate an investigation.

Canada is often compared to Australia. In committees, we often ask what Australia is doing, perhaps to follow its lead. In Australia, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission can conduct general investigations into all sectors of the economy. The commissioner can conduct investigations on his own initiative. We want to do the same thing.

In 1998, when the CITT Act was passed, Canada conducted four inquiries. However, as I said earlier, there have been no inquiries related to competition issues under the Inquiries Act since the repeal of section 47 in 1986. It is important to mention that even the Commissioner of Competition, Konrad von Finckenstein, described the flaws in the Competition Act in his testimony before the Standing Committee on Industry on May 5, 2003. He said:

While the bureau's mandate includes the very important role of being investigator and advocate for competition, the current legislation does not provide the bureau with the authority to conduct an industry study... It seems to me that it would be preferable to have a study on the overall situation carried out by an independent body that would have authority, that would be able to summon witnesses and gather information. It should also have the power to protect confidential information that someone is not necessarily going to want to share, but which would be vital in order to reach a conclusion based on the real facts.

In the United States, a study on oil companies was conducted to determine whether the refineries had tried to increase the price of gas at the pumps for consumers. It is also important for consumers in Canada and Quebec that a similar study be conducted by the Competition Bureau.

• (1810)

I want to refer you to an article about a report. On Saturday, May 25, 2002, the magazine *Les Affaires* reported that refiners had tried to drive up gas prices at the pump in the U.S. by deliberately reducing supply.

I can say right now—even today we have heard stories about oil companies—that since the closure of the refinery in Montreal, the price of gas is much lower. That is why it is important for the Competition Bureau to have the authority to investigate.

• (1815)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated my colleague's speech. I can say that in my riding, the price of gas is unbelievable. It is often as high as \$1.30 and sometimes higher. Whether in Wawa or Kapuskasing, everyone is very worried about gas prices. The fact is, in northern communities, we do not have much choice. We have to drive to our doctor's appointments and to work because everything is far away.

I support the member's bill. Perhaps he could expand on the fact that we really need to ensure that the Competition Bureau has the power to investigate. I think that is a very good idea. We have been

asking the Liberals and the Conservatives to take concrete action on this for some time now, but nothing has been done.

Mr. Robert Vincent: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member. She is quite right. How can anyone convince themselves that gas prices should be so high, when we already know that whenever there is even speculation about the per barrel price of crude oil going up, the price at the pump increases? While the gas in the cisterns was purchased at a lower price, as soon as there is speculation about an increase, the price at the pump goes up.

If oil companies want to operate like that, they should do so both ways. When the cost of a barrel of crude oil drops, the price at the pump should also go down that very day, that very hour, that very minute. But that is not what happens. They use up their stock. Even the oil companies, refineries that have cisterns with millions of gallons of gas, sell it at a price that is much too high, based solely on speculation. That is terrible. I do not understand this.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague from Shefford on his excellent speech. As you know, this is the subject of the hour. As my colleague said, it is an urgent matter. Who pays the price? It is the workers who go to work every day and who buy groceries to feed themselves. I still call these basic or minimum needs.

Unfortunately, today, we are spending more money on gas than we are on rent, food, hospital visits, etc. This is an urgent situation; it is having a major impact. When they go to the pump in the morning, workers and everyone else are complaining about the price of gas. Unfortunately, it is only the government that does not hear these cries for help, in fact, it stopped hearing them a long time ago. I am aware that the Liberals, just like the Conservatives, also ignored these cries for help.

However, today, we have to do something. If we do not, the prices will skyrocket and it is the workers, those who cannot even manage to negotiate reasonable salary increases, who will suffer as they are forced to cope with increased gas prices.

I would therefore like my colleague to tell us about the impact this will have on workers.

Mr. Robert Vincent: Mr. Speaker, we are already seeing in the papers how the price of groceries is going to increase because of transportation costs. The price of all goods and services will increase because of the cost of transportation. It seems that these people are trying to play mind games with us by telling us that, at a given moment, gas will reach a certain price and the price of everything will go up. However, the price of everything cannot go up; we still have to be able to pay for things.

The Conservative government is opposed to this bill, but I can tell you that it will be among the first to pay too much. Given its fleet of cars, trucks and other equipment that use gas, it will pay the price. And I can tell you that it will cost several million dollars.

Private Members' Business

[English]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to rise this evening to participate in the third reading debate of Bill C-452.

This private member's bill seeks to amend the Competition Act to provide Canada's Commissioner of the Competition Bureau with the power to launch a broad-based inquiry into an industry sector in Canada.

I will give a brief history of this bill in Parliament.

Bill C-452 was added to the order of precedence last spring and referred to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, of which I am a member, just prior to the summer recess of Parliament.

The industry committee took up its consideration of Bill C-452 in two sessions this past December prior to the Christmas break. With the support of all three opposition parties, the committee members agreed to report the bill back to the House of Commons without amendment. This is where we stand today.

The government has raised several concerns with Bill C-452 over the last number of months and I will highlight a number of them.

First, it is not evident that the new powers proposed in the bill are required or helpful given the authority that the competition commissioner already has under the existing legislation. The 2009 amendments to the Competition Act provided the commissioner with significantly stronger tools to take action against cartel activities, which are a source of concern underlying this bill.

Second, there is a risk that authorizing this use of formal investigation powers to conduct open-ended inquiries into industry sectors could pose significant compliance and reputation costs on the businesses that they affect. This would also impose significant financial and human resource costs on the Competition Bureau. This would require the commissioner to reallocate resources away from her current enforcement priorities, including cartel investigations and other anti-competitive conduct that negatively impacts the day-to-day lives of Canadians.

Third, during the committee hearings it became evident that a misconception regarding the commissioner's ability to initiate an investigation into wrongdoing or, specifically, an incorrect concern that she does not have this power, may be a driving force behind the bill.

While appearing at the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology in December, the representative from the Competition Bureau clarified that the competition commissioner does not require the powers in this bill to discharge any of her enforcement responsibilities. The commissioner already has clear authority under the act to initiate her own investigation into the actions of businesses and individuals whenever there is evidence that the enforcement provisions have been, or are about to be violated.

More important to our debate today, she does not have to wait for the filing of a complaint by the public or for instructions from the minister. In fact, the committee was told that at the time of the hearings, approximately 30% of the ongoing formal investigations

under the act were initiated by the commissioner without having received a complaint regarding that matter. Clearly the commissioner is able to exercise her discretion to act whenever the circumstances warrant.

In our debate on the merits of the bill today, we believe it is important that we also reflect on the advice that the Canadian Bar Association provided to the committee in December. During their testimony, representatives of the Canadian Bar Association examined the types of outcomes resulting from such broad-based industry inquiries. Their overall conclusion was that they could not foresee any circumstance where there would be any overreaching benefit to society resulting from this bill.

The Canadian Bar Association explored three possible outcomes.

First, at the end of such an inquiry the commissioner concludes that the sector in question is sufficiently competitive. In that situation, the bureau would likely be widely criticized, both for significant financial costs and for disruptions it imposed on the daily business operations of Canadian businesses, only to confirm that the market in question was indeed competitive.

• (1820)

Second, the sector is not sufficiently competitive. However, this could be owing to such aspects as the structure of the market and is in no way related to the conduct that offends the specific enforcement provisions of the Competition Act.

As we are aware, the commissioner does not gain any new authority through the bill that would allow her to impose structural changes on the market. As a result, in these circumstances there would be a finding that the market is not competitive, but there would not be any avenues available to the commissioner to address the problem. Such an outcome would only result in widespread frustration to the entire process.

A third outcome that the Bar Association highlighted is that the commissioner could determine that the industry is not sufficiently competitive and that it is indeed the result of activities that violate specific provisions of the Competition Act.

The bar cautioned committee members that the bureau's ability to pursue a subsequent case using its enforcement powers may be potentially undermined on account of the legal due process concerns arising from the manner in which the evidence was collected.

In particular, the bar was of the view that serious legal challenges could arise regarding the rights against self-incrimination, where information is compelled from a person for the purpose of a market-wide inquiry and then later used in enforcement proceedings against that person.

Even in this case, where anti-competitive behaviour has been identified, the commissioner's ability to challenge the behaviour may be hindered because of the legal constraints that could arise from this bill.

Private Members' Business

The bar also took the opportunity to remind committee members of the fundamental objective that the Competition Act is designed to address, which is to protect the competitive process and not the day-to-day operations of specific markets. This is done through targeted enforcement action against specific anti-competitive conduct. The act is not intended to regulate the operations of a market.

In conclusion, I want to remind the House that it has only been 24 months since Parliament passed the most significant amendments to the Competition Act in 20 years.

During the industry committee's review of Bill C-452, both the Canadian Bar Association and representatives from the bureau emphasized the value and clarity provided by these new laws, which make it clear and unequivocal that it is illegal to agree with one's competitor on price, market allocation or output levels.

In effect, this government provided the competition commissioner with access through the amended legislation to new and powerful provisions that clearly strike at the heart of the concerns that underlie this legislative initiative.

It is important that we allow more time before we move to consider further changes to such an important piece of the framework of legislation. Only in that way will we be able to judge the full effect of the new provisions that this government has introduced to the Competition Act.

• (1825)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by the member, but I do not necessarily agree with what he said. At the end of the day, the passage of a bill of this nature is in the best interests of our country and consumers, ultimately. In fact, I support the bill, as well as the Liberal Party critic. We will have to wait to see what happens at third reading.

One thing I would like to recognize is the fact that some of these issues are consumer-oriented and speak to Canadians in a very real and tangible way. Some of those issues include the price of gas, banking fees and things of this nature, issues that average Canadians have to face day in and day out.

Let us take a look at the impact of the price of gas. The percentage of the overall population that believes there is something wrong in the gas industry is immense. I was affiliated with the gas industry as a very young man, at the age of 11. I pumped gas. If the corner gas station put the price of gas at x cents, other stations copied that price or they would get a phone call telling them to match that price. They had to be competitive with the price.

Even back in the early 1970s, consumers felt that there were a few gas companies and the price of gas always seemed to be the same or close to it. There was a sense of frustration as to how to justify the increases, especially if we take a look at it in the last number of years. Four or five years the price of a litre of gas was 80¢.

I just sent a text to my assistant in Winnipeg to find out the price of gas at a local station there. It is \$1.15 for a litre of gas. I have seen it well over \$1.20 a litre. Think of the impact that has on the economy. Let us say someone burns 40 litres, which is it not much. A person can drive a Cobalt for a week and burn 40 litres very easily.

That is a modest car that many people drive and is somewhat gas efficient.

If the price is \$1.20 a litre, 40 litres would cost \$48 compared to a few years back when it was 80¢ a litre and it would have cost \$32. That is a \$16 difference. Imagine what that consumer could do with that \$16. Maybe he or she could purchase a TV or go out for a meal. Those are the types of purchases that could be made.

If we were to canvass the average person at the pump putting gas in his or her vehicle, that individual would say there has to be some sort of price fixing going on because it just does not make sense. A very small minority would disagree with that assessment.

In good part, the Canadians are looking to the House and asking what Ottawa is prepared to do to deal with this problem. I do not know why the government would fear Bill C-452. It says that it already allows the commissioner to conduct inquiries. This legislation would provide a lot more clarity to it. There would no doubt that the commissioner would have the authority.

Today the commissioner has the responsibility for the administration and enforcement of the Competition Act. He can launch inquiries to a good degree and challenge matters before the Competition Tribunal. He can make recommendations on criminal matters to the Director of Public Prosecutions. He can intervene as a competition advocate, whether it is in a provincial or federal arena.

• (1830)

What would the bill actually do? It would allow, in a very clear and concise way, the commissioner to look at an entire sector and say that he or she is concerned about the perception of the average consumer or a vast majority of Canadians toward price-fixing at the gas pump. The commissioner can investigate, call witnesses, hold individuals, corporations and boards accountable for the price of gas. What is wrong with that? Why would we not want to make our expectations perfectly clear?

There is nothing wrong with using the Competition Act in a manner which would enable and empower our commissioner to look at an industry that has caused a great deal of frustration for a good number of years. I can recall it all the way back to the 1970s. I suspect it is only a question of time. If we continue to ignore the issue, the public, as a whole, will continue to build that sense of frustration and disappointment as to why Ottawa has not responded to the needs of average consumers.

If I were anywhere in Canada, putting gas in my the car, and found out that the government had an opportunity to pass a bill of this nature, but said that it was not necessary, I would be disappointed. I would like to see a government take whatever actions it can to protect the consumer.

The government talked about a decrease in the GST. If we go from that \$1.15, \$1.20 a litre back to a few years ago when it was 80¢ a litre, that is a lot of money. A lot of disposable income is being gobbled up at the pump.

Private Members' Business

We can do a lot more to provide and restore confidence in the public to show the politicians in Ottawa care about the consumer, that we will not sit back and say that this is the way it has been, that it will continue to be that way and the consumer pay will pay whatever the big oil companies want to charge for gas. That would be highly irresponsible.

As has been pointed out, the price of gas causes huge ripple effects, which affect us all. In terms of the affordability of food in some of the northern parts of Manitoba and other remote areas in Canada, huge increases in the price of gas mean that to provide those communities with milk and fresh produce the price will go up dramatically as a direct result.

The Conservative Party claims to be a party that represents western Canada. Western Canada has a good number of farmers and the price of gas is hurting a lot of farmers, particularly in the Prairies. Those farmers need to have a government that recognizes the value of having someone standing up against the oil companies and holding them to account to ensure there is a higher sense of competition. At the end of the day, the farmers are paying a lot more for their gas and that is going to have to be passed on to someone.

We are allowing a few in certain geographic areas of the world to get exceptionally wealthy, while at the other end there is more and more poverty because of issues like the oil prices. I do not believe we spend enough time talking about the cost of energy. This type of bill can go a long way—

• (1835)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I understand the hon. member for Churchill is rising on a question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

SIT-IN AT HILL OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS MINISTER

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to a question of privilege that was raised earlier.

Yesterday, I accompanied the delegation of the Sayisi Dene elders and leaders, who are from Tadoule Lake in northern Manitoba.

The Sayisi Dene have a long-standing claim, based on a forced relocation imposed by the Government of Canada in 1956, a claim that is one of the few imposed based on a forced relocation of aboriginal people that has yet to be resolved.

The Sayisi Dene, who are my constituents, wanted to ask for a meeting with the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, a meeting for which they have asked for quite some time. I helped my constituents in requesting this very meeting. There was no intention to obstruct any work being done. This was not an orchestrated event and to characterize it as such would be incorrect.

I would like to note that the elders were offered to sit in the office, while a response could be given. As the MP, I asked for the meeting and listened to the request of these elders. I then stepped out of the office, shortly after which the chief of staff arrived and offered to meet with myself, the lawyer for the Sayisi Dene and the chief of the Sayisi Dene. We met. Then we returned to the delegation, where the

chief of staff committed to a meeting between the minister and the delegation in the near future.

Security were there, outside of the office, reports were filed and I would encourage the Speaker to examine all such security reports.

I would like to point out that the tone of the exchange was respectful throughout. Not only that, but the exchange ended with handshakes and on a respectful note. There seemed to be a clear understanding of the gravity of the situation facing the Sayisi Dene, a people who have suffered immeasurably as a result of the forced relocation imposed by the Government of Canada in 1956.

I would also like to respond to the reference to my meeting with the minister. I would like to clarify for the record that I had been requesting a meeting with him for about three months.

I go back to yesterday. I would like to note and emphasize that the tone throughout was one of utmost respect, a reference that was reiterated by the elders who led this delegation.

Finally, it ended with the meeting being committed to, a commitment made by the chief of staff representing the minister.

I hope the minister will meet with the chief and the elders of the Sayisi Dene at the nearest opportunity. After all, that is what they have asked for. It has been a long time that the Sayisi Dene people have been waiting and, with respect, offering at every step of the way to work with the Government of Canada to begin their journey and our journey of reconciliation.

• (1840)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for that statement. I am sure the Speaker will come back to the House with a decision on this matter in due course.

* * *

COMPETITION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-452, An Act to amend the Competition Act (inquiry into industry sector), be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-452, An Act to amend the Competition Act (inquiry into industry sector).

I commend my colleague, the member for Shefford, for bringing forward such an important amendment to the Competition Act. I am happy to say that the New Democratic Party will be supporting this vital legislative initiative.

In essence, this bill seeks to change the current law, which says the Commissioner of Competition can only launch an investigation when there is a concern about one or more market participants. While the bill appears to have originally been tabled to deal with the retail gasoline sector, the broad amendment makes the proposed legislation applicable for all industry sectors, including communications industries.

Private Members' Business

This is particularly important at this time, as the banking disputes over competition have been increasing over the past few months, whether it is in relation to the oil and gas sector where consumers are being gouged at the pumps by abusive practices which hurt the wallets of ordinary working and middle-class Canadians, or some other issue.

I heard my hon. colleague from Winnipeg North talk about the gas prices in his riding. I believe he said it cost \$1.20 a litre. In Sudbury right now it is close to \$1.30. My colleague from Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksasing said the price in Wawa and Elliot Lake is \$1.30 in some cases.

The dispute over usage-based billing demonstrates that we need this tool to widen the scope to encapsulate not just the oil and gas sector, which we are talking about, but other major sectors of our economy as well.

In the oil and gas sector there is clearly a lack of refining capacity in Canada. Coupled with vertical integration, this basically leads to a formula that is a recipe for disaster for Canadians and their pocketbooks.

It is interesting that when the government lowered the GST with regard to oil and gas, the companies did not pass the reduction on to consumers. Prices and profits have risen significantly and not even one single organization or company has taken advantage of the opportunity to pass the 2¢ reduction on to consumers. The companies took it and put it in their own pockets. That is shameful. More important, that 2% has a large impact on working and middle-class families who are being financially squeezed during tough economic times.

Therefore, it is only fair that we examine the bill and look at the oil and gas sector as one of the variables in how it can be addressed because the bill is specifically geared to the industry sector, which is a responsible way to approach it. It allows targeting to certain areas where there is a lot of interest.

In terms of the telecommunications sector, we have the entrance of new players into the Canadian market with regard to telecom and that means more communication devices, cellphones, BlackBerrys, iPhones, and wireless service providers that are being expanded in Canada. There are those who feel there is no competition in that sector and relatively similar pricing that makes it very difficult for consumers to get a better benefit. These companies have also been receiving record profits and are quite lucrative. Almost all of the groups and organizations of the big telecommunication companies have done extremely well.

Both the current CRTC chair, and Sheridan Scott, the former commissioner, have advocated for the authority to conduct market studies during their tenures as the head of the bureau. This amendment to the Competition Act is therefore obviously something which the regulators of our telecom sector deem necessary for bringing Canada's telecommunications regime into the 21st century. We have seen there are flaws in this regime and this bill is an important step in redressing these shortcomings.

Another issue raised often with regard to this issue is credit cards, something I have been talking about quite often. New Democrats have been calling for a number of credit card reforms. I have been

pushing this issue to the forefront. The Minister of Finance is in favour of a voluntary agreement. It is clear that we have deficient credit card competition in Canada. There are some groups and organizations that are more progressive, but at the same time it is seen basically as a system that is stuck where the vast majority of credit cards have interest rates that are quite similar.

• (1845)

This voluntary code is not sufficient. We need something with the necessary teeth to oversee the credit card industry. I feel this amendment would provide an extra layer of protection for ordinary Canadian consumers, as well as small and independent businesses which are routinely encountering major issues with the predatory practices which are being employed by credit card providers. This is an area where we need to see more healthy competition, but we have not.

The banks are also making record profits, and we have seen the same things there. My office receives complaints with regard to how close bank fees are among different organizations. There does not actually have to be collusion where there are brown envelopes changing hands and information being wired back and forth to predetermine the actual cost of items and passing it on to consumers. There just has to be a general acknowledgement that they will stay in a certain field of play and compete in that field of play. That is not real competition.

Small and independent retailers are facing a similar dilemma in regard to the anti-competitive practices. The big issue for retailers is the influx of premium cards, for instance, and those that offer generous air miles. Consumers are lured to those cards because they offer a chance to collect points faster and reap the rewards such as free flights, electronics and jewellery. The use of these premium cards has risen dramatically since they first hit the market in 2008. That high end plastic, such as the Visa Infinite or the World Elite MasterCard, cost more for retailers to process than other standard gold or platinum cards.

Consumers do not know that their demand for those freebies from the credit card companies is actually squeezing profits from these small businesses, because it is the merchants who really foot this bill. Ordinarily the cost per transaction ranges from 1% to 3% of every sale, whether the customer pays cash or pulls out a card. Premium cards require much more than that, considering the razor-thin margins the competitive market demands, and \$5 billion is a lot.

Family debt is on the rise. The debt carried by the average Canadian household has hit \$100,000, up about 78% from two decades ago. The debt to income ratio stands at a record 150%, meaning for every \$1,000 after tax income, Canadian families owe an average of \$1,500.

In summary, Canadian families cannot wait much longer. They are being gouged because of anti-competitive practices in every facet of their lives, be it gas, cellphones, the Internet and their credit card bills.

Bill C-452 is a very, very important first step in curtailing these abusive practices, and I call on all members of the House to support my colleague's bill.

Private Members' Business

● (1850)

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today in the House on Bill C-452, An Act to amend the Competition Act (inquiry into industry sector) introduced by my colleague from Shefford.

Bill C-452 proposes to amend the Competition Act to give more power to the Competition Bureau. I would like to start by congratulating my colleague for this fine and very important private member's bill. I think this is a subject that is dear to his heart and I want to salute the quality of the work he has done.

The amendment proposed by my colleague from Shefford will allow the Commissioner of Competition to initiate inquiries of his own accord into fluctuations in the price of gasoline, if there are reasonable grounds for doing so. It will therefore no longer be necessary to wait for complaints to be filed before making an inquiry. If this bill is enacted, the Competition Bureau will be better equipped to combat companies that might profit from their dominant market position to pick consumers' pockets.

Every time gas prices rise, the governments hands us the same answer: nothing can be done, the Competition Bureau has concluded there was no agreement among the oil companies to fix prices. The truth is that there are a number of flaws in the present act. It does not allow the Competition Bureau to initiate inquiries. And when there is an inquiry, the Competition Bureau cannot really do anything with them because at present it cannot compel the production of documents or protect witnesses. Bill C-452 would eliminate these flaws by allowing the Bureau to initiate inquiries and allowing the federal Trade Tribunal to protect witnesses and seize relevant documents.

If the act is not amended, gas prices will continue to fluctuate with no justification, as is the case at present. And it will again, and still, be consumers who will continue to pay for the more dubious practices on the part of the oil companies.

Gas prices fluctuating is one thing. It is another thing when they rise stealthily and without justification. Recently, prices at the pump rose because of the political instability in north Africa. In just a few hours, prices rose spectacularly. That is completely bizarre, when we know that the events that occurred in north Africa had at that point not yet had any impact on the cost of refined gasoline that was already in Quebec. That practice is nothing more nor less than a way of making even more money on the backs of consumers, and there is a lot. It is estimated that because of collusion, retailers have overcharged Quebec consumers by as much as \$100 million.

The Bloc Québécois recently supported Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and the Weights and Measures Act, to fix price errors at the pump. But that bill does not solve the problems of collusion like the ones recently disclosed in Quebec and does not prevent sudden increases in the price of gas. The Conservative government claims that its initiative will save the public a lot of money. Gas consumption in Canada, calculated over a full year, is so high that it is completely foolish to think that bill can have any impact on consumers' wallets. That is why we in the Bloc Québécois believe that in order to respond effectively to gas price

increases, Bill C-452 must be enacted. This bill is the only thing that will have a real impact on prices at the pump.

For years, the Bloc Québécois has been pressuring the federal government to finally take action to address the rising cost of petroleum products. It has dogged the Liberal government of the day so that it would follow up on the recommendations made in 2003 by the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. In October 2005, just before the election, the federal government finally listened to the Bloc Québécois' arguments and decided to amend the Competition Act through Bill C-19. That legislation broadened the Competition Bureau's authority to investigate and increased the maximum penalty for conspiracy. However, Bill C-19 did not follow up on all the committee's recommendations. As we know, that legislation, which was only an election ploy, died on the order paper with the election call, and we certainly could not count on the Conservative government to bring it back.

● (1855)

In 2007, the Bloc Québécois introduced Bill C-454, which also died on the order paper, when the election of 2008 was called.

In 2009, the Conservatives took part of the bill and included it in the budget implementation act. However, they did not see fit to allow the Competition Bureau to initiate investigations. That is why the hon. member for Shefford came back again with Bill C-452. The recent years clearly show that neither the Conservatives, nor the Liberals acted to protect consumers. By contrast, the Bloc Québécois is taking action.

For the Bloc Québécois, the only effective way to deal with the rising cost of gas is to use a global strategy. That strategy is three-pronged: to bring the industry into line, to make it contribute, and to reduce our dependency on oil.

First, we must bring the oil industry into line. The initiative of my colleague for Shefford supports that approach. It is also necessary to set up a true monitoring agency for the oil sector.

Second, the oil industry must make a contribution. With the increase of costs and oil company profits, it is important that the latter pay their fair share of taxes. How can we accept that consumers are getting poorer, while oil companies are getting richer?

Despite the recent recession and despite the rise in the price of gas, oil companies are posting record sales. In 1995, the Canadian oil and gas sector posted combined sales of \$25 billion. By 2008, this figure had climbed to \$148 billion. That is an increase of nearly 600%.

Now let us talk about profits. In 2003, Canada's oil sector made \$17.6 billion in profits. In 2008, it made \$79 billion. In other words, the net profits of Canada's oil sector more than quadrupled in just five years. The Bloc members feel that the party must end for the oil companies.

But obviously the Conservatives do not feel that way. In 2003, they supported the Liberal government's move to reduce the overall tax rate for oil companies from 28% to 21%. With the changes brought in by the Liberals, supported by the Conservatives, taxes for Canada's oil sector became more advantageous than in Texas.

But that is not enough. In 2007, in their economic statement, the Conservatives introduced tax cuts for oil companies that would see their tax rates drop to 15% in 2012. These tax cuts will enable the oil companies to pocket approximately \$3.6 billion in 2012. These figures make it clear that the federal government chooses to give priority to the interests of the oil companies, at the expense of consumers.

I do not know how the Conservative members justify this to their constituents, but I know that when I meet my constituents from Compton—Stanstead, not a single one tells me that the gifts to the oil companies are justified. On the contrary, the people I meet feel cheated by this Conservative government, a government that is in league with an industry that exploits consumers' dependence on oil.

The third component of the approach proposed by the Bloc Québécois has to do with reducing consumers' dependence on oil. This makes sense and it is perfectly in line with Quebec's efforts to fight global warming. The less gas that we consume, the less money the industry will pocket and the better off our planet will be.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1900)

[English]

TAXATION

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have this chance to revisit the issue of offshore tax havens and put a little more meat on the bones of this topic than we get a chance to do in question period.

Tax havens are nothing new. They are a phenomenon that dates back to the 1960s. Given our financial challenges and the spending we have incurred in order to stimulate our economy, it is galling that people will go out of their way to hide money from Revenue Canada. It is estimated that offshore tax havens siphon \$500 billion away from the tax man every year around the world. Places like the Cayman Islands, the Bahamas, Bermuda, Panama, the Channel Islands, Monaco, Luxembourg, Lichtenstein, Singapore and Switzerland provide banking beyond the reach of institutions like Canada Revenue. We can see that it is not a phenomenon unique to Canada, but that does not mean we should condone or accept it either.

New Democrats have long been critical of the Canadian government's seeming indifference to tax cheats who use offshore tax havens to bleed our economy for their own benefit. We see how small tax offences are prosecuted thoroughly, and these bigger and

Adjournment Proceedings

more egregious offences are largely left alone. I have joined other New Democrats in asking a number of questions on the subject this year.

In September, my leader pointed out that the top five Canadian banks use tax havens to avoid paying \$16 billion in income tax. Sadly, and far too often, we receive dismissive answers from the government and promotion of their incomplete efforts on the issue, rather than an admission that there is so much more to do with respect to battling this white collar crime, which is exactly what it is. It is a crime perpetrated on all Canadians, and the only reason it persists is the lack of political will to do anything about it. It is clear that the government is not even aware of the scope of the problem. If it is, it is not telling Canadians about it. This is despite the examples of some of our closest trading partners. The United States, Mexico and even Britain can be cited as countries that are showing their citizens that they are serious about combatting this type of tax evasion.

We speak at length about transparency, and although it is clear that the government has difficulty with transparency, it actually has a chance to do something about it. We hear the minister bragging about locating more money offshore than the Liberals did when they were in power but we do not hear him bragging about the increased government attempts to locate tax cheats. That is because it is not doing much. We do have a voluntary disclosure program that will tempt a few of the more honest tax cheats to volunteer their information. However, I would imagine that the WikiLeaks documents naming 2,000 individuals with Swiss bank accounts will scare more people into disclosure than any voluntary program the government has in place.

What makes matters worse is that we receive reports that the CRA is cutting back 200 investigators charged with looking into offshore accounts. How does this send a strong message to Canadians hiding money in offshore accounts? Where is the consistency? Why not add personnel to the unit that investigates these crimes, not reduce them?

For every dollar that we spend tracking down tax cheats, we recover five dollars. It is a no-brainer and really speaks to the government's priorities that it has not done this already. How is it that the government, which bills itself as tough on crime, will not roll up its sleeves and do the hard work now when the economy needs these funds the most?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to stand today as it is my first time in the late show as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, but, more important, to negate some of the inaccuracies in terms of what my colleague just stated.

I am pleased to share with her that the finance committee did a non-partisan study, which we all had the opportunity to enjoy, as all of the members are very concerned about the issues of tax havens. What we are finding out is that phenomenal progress has been made, especially in the last five years. Therefore, to say that nothing has been done is absolutely inaccurate. We have had many witnesses come and talk about the phenomenal progress that has occurred in the last five years.

Adjournment Proceedings

What we learned in the committee is that it is very important to look at tax avoidance and tax evasion in two very different lights. We must also recognize that there are companies in Canada that do legitimate business offshore and we should not be painting everything with the same brush. No one is saying that we should not be doing legitimate business offshore. Everyone believes that tax evasion is wrong and we need to bring in the full power of the law.

Again, committee members have been learning very interesting things. I would like to quote from Jeffrey Owens of the OECD who said:

The other thing that's important is the deterrence effect. I talk to a lot of business people, financial advisers, and investment banks, and the one thing that clearly has changed here is that if they get a Canadian client who comes to them and says, "Look, I want to evade taxes; perhaps I could use Barbados or somewhere else", they'll say, "Forget it. Those days are gone." There's been a change in attitude on the part of the business community, and that should not be underestimated.

One would expect that this recognition of change in attitude of the Canadian investment advisors is, in large measure, due to actions undertaken by the Prime Minister and the current Conservative government. Among these, Canada has been a world leader in battling this global program.

The CRA is a member of many international organizations and forums that work together to counter aggressive international tax planning. These include: the OECD Working Party on exchange of information and tax compliance; the global forum on transparency and exchange of information; the forum on tax administration; the Joint International Tax Shelter Information Centre; and, the Seven Country Working Group on Tax Havens.

Canada is one of 95 jurisdictions that have agreed to the international standard for exchange of information, including access to bank information.

Canada has an extensive network of tax treaties, one of the largest in the world, with 87 treaties in force.

The Finance Minister announced in the 2007 budget that all of Canada's new treaties and any revisions to existing treaties must include the new OECD standard for exchange of information. The 2007 budget also announced measures that would encourage jurisdictions to enter into tax information exchange agreements, TIEA, with Canada. The TIEA is a relatively new type of agreement used to exchange information in jurisdictions where there is little or no tax and a full tax, partly to prevent double taxation, is thus not required.

Currently we have 11 signed TIEA agreements and 14 in negotiations.

This is where there are a lot of inaccuracies in the members' statements. Since 2006, the number of full-time employees working in the CRA's aggressive tax planning program has doubled and the number of full-time employees working on international audits is up 44%.

An additional—

•(1905)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasung.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue for her comments on this and her answers, but I was also at those meetings and there were concerns raised there.

There is no doubt that the government could and should be doing more and New Democrats have a plan that it can freely borrow if it wants to get serious about the issue. We proposed these actions in the autumn and the government still has not made use of these concrete suggestions.

First, we need to deal with transparency. We need to identify the current tax losses and assess their impact on federal and provincial treasuries. Without this basic information, Canadians will remain skeptical about any other initiatives we take on the issue.

Second, we need to beef up enforcement. We need to increase the Canada Revenue Agency's compliance resources to recover more lost revenue.

Finally, with respect to disclosure, we need to adopt regulations to shift the onus for revealing tax avoidance measures to the filer, as has been done in the United States.

Those are achievable measures that will go a long way to turning off the tap for—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, aggressive international tax planning, including hiding income in offshore accounts, is a major concern for tax authorities worldwide. Our vast information exchange network allows Canada to be at the forefront when it comes to detecting and fighting all forms of international tax evasion and avoidance.

Our government's fundamental approach to tax administration has always been, and will continue to be, to encourage individuals and businesses to self-assess and pay their taxes responsibly. We deal harshly with those who attempt to avoid their legal responsibilities.

With respect to Canada's efforts, Mr. Dave Sohmer of Spiegel Sohmer remarked at the finance committee, "I think Canada has done a marvellous job in the international arena...Canada has played a significant role...".

Finally, I note former Liberal cabinet minister and secretary general of the OECD, Donald Johnston, congratulated this Conservative government at the finance committee when he observed, "—the progress that has been made...over the last five years...is really quite remarkable".

•(1910)

[*Translation*]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Reform Conservatives now have control of the Senate. They are further sabotaging democracy by, among other things, obstructing the passing of Bill C-232, which simply asks that Supreme Court justices be bilingual.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Bloc Québécois supports the principle of Bill C-232, which provides that Supreme Court judges should be bilingual and capable of hearing cases without the assistance of an interpreter. We are asking for this out of respect for Quebeckers, as well as all Acadians and all francophone Canadians. We are also doing so because the Official Languages Act provides that English and French have equality of status and use, and because the French and English versions of federal acts have equal value and one is not considered a translation of the other.

The right of any citizen to use French or English before Canada's courts is a fundamental linguistic right. The Official Languages Act already recognizes the importance of being understood without the assistance of an interpreter before federal tribunals such as the Tax Court of Canada, the Federal Court and the Federal Court of Appeal.

It is also because of the problems that come with simultaneous interpretation, which does not allow enough reaction time to interrupt and ask questions, for the judge, the lawyers or even the litigants, who have the right to grasp all the nuances and subtleties of each respective language.

With regard to the principle behind bilingual Supreme Court justices, it is important to note that on May 21, 2008, the members of the Quebec National Assembly unanimously passed the following motion:

That the National Assembly of Québec affirm that French language proficiency is a prerequisite and essential condition for the appointment of Supreme Court of Canada judges.

The Premier of Quebec, Jean Charest, said: "Knowledge of French is important, very important. It is not a choice. And the message we are sending today to the federal government is that it is not optional".

To know a language is to know a culture, a reality. And those who are called on to interpret that reality and make decisions that will have a very important impact on our lives have to know that reality through our language.

That is what Premier Jean Charest of Quebec said.

The Premier of Quebec is also of the opinion that "open federalism must ensure that judges appointed to the Supreme Court by Ottawa know Canada's two official languages".

The Standing Committee on Official Languages also looked at the issue of comprehension of the two official languages by Supreme Court judges. In its fourth report, tabled in May 2008, it "recommends that the government ensure that the judges that they appoint to the Supreme Court are bilingual".

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always find it somewhat strange whenever I hear a member of the Bloc Québécois stand and criticize a parliamentary institution like the Senate because as we know, the Bloc does not believe in the Senate. In fact, the Bloc does not believe in Parliament. In fact, the Bloc does not believe in Canada, at least the Canada as I know it, a Canada that includes Quebec, because the Bloc, as we all know, wants Quebec to separate from Canada.

So, on one hand, to complain about a parliamentary institution while in the same breath arguing against Parliament seems to be, at best, a slight bit hypocritical.

However, I would suggest that if he does truly have a concern about the Senate and perhaps, as he thinks, the Senate's abuse of power, he should join with us and our government in our attempts to reform the Senate.

We believe that the Senate, as we know it now, the status quo, is not an option. We believe there needs to be some democratic reform initiatives brought into the Senate. Specifically, we have a couple of initiatives before us, one emanating out of the Senate, called the senatorial selection act, which is an attempt to allow Canadians to voice their opinion on who they would like to see represent them in the Senate. The second, of course, is Senate term limits, an act that we have here in Parliament which would restrict the length of time that senators could spend in the Senate. Our term limit is suggested as eight years, as opposed to the current 45 year maximum.

Those two reform initiatives alone would go a long way toward ensuring that the Senate of Canada is a better place, a more functioning place, and represents Canadians better.

I encourage the member opposite to join us with those initiatives.

● (1915)

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary may better understand this point of Bill C-232, which would require Supreme Court justices to be bilingual. Graham Fraser, the Commissioner of Official Languages, had this to say:

Every Canadian's right to use English or French in Canadian courts is one of the basic language rights set out in our constitutional framework.

Perhaps he should re-examine the reality of what he is attacking by not accepting the principle that Supreme Court justices must be bilingual.

Thus, the Reform Conservative government must stop blocking passage of Bill C-232 by the Senate out of concern for democracy.

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, once again, I merely suggest to my hon. colleague across the floor, a member of the Bloc Québécois, if he truly wants to reform the Senate, if he truly wants to see improvements in the Senate, he should join with our government in our efforts to make meaningful reforms.

I know this is not something that the Bloc Québécois usually concerns itself with, but it is something I am suggesting it should be involved with because all members of Parliament, whether they believe in a united Canada or a divided Canada, as the Bloc does, should join with all parliamentarians to try to make this institution better.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:18 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, March 10, 2011

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS		Request for Emergency Debate	
Government Response to Petitions		Middle East	
Mr. Obhrai	8869	Mr. Karygiannis	8872
Interparliamentary Delegations		The Speaker	8872
Mr. Benoit	8869		
Committees of the House		GOVERNMENT ORDERS	
Natural Resources		Freezing Assets of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act	
Mr. Benoit	8869	Mr. Moore (for the Minister of Foreign Affairs)	8872
Canada Post-Secondary Education Act		Bill C-61. Third reading	8872
Ms. Ashton	8869	Mr. Obhrai	8872
Bill C-635. Introduction and first reading	8869	Mr. Rae	8872
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	8869	Mr. Paquette	8873
		Mr. Dewar	8873
Marine Mammal Regulations		(Bill read the third time and passed)	8873
Mr. Armstrong	8869	Business of Supply	
Bill C-636. Introduction and first reading	8869	Opposition Motion—Conduct of Government	
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	8870	Mr. Paquette	8873
Public Transit Operators Protection Act (Bregg's Law)		Motion	8873
Mr. Rathgeber	8870	Mr. Gravelle	8874
Bill C-637. Introduction and first reading	8870	Ms. Brunelle	8875
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	8870	Ms. Gagnon	8875
Information Commissioner		Mr. André	8876
The Speaker	8870	Mr. Gravelle	8877
Business of the House		Mr. Lebel	8877
Mr. O'Connor	8870	Mr. Maloway	8878
Motion	8870	Ms. Brunelle	8879
(Motion agreed to)	8870	Mr. Jean	8879
Petitions		Mr. Jean	8879
Broadcasting Industry		Ms. Gagnon	8880
Mr. Valeriote	8870	Mr. André	8881
Gasoline Prices		Mr. Masse	8882
Mr. Vincent	8870	Ms. Bennett	8882
Air Canada		Ms. Brunelle	8885
Mr. Maloway	8871	Mr. Lobb	8885
Right to Life		Mr. Maloway	8885
Mr. Benoit	8871	Mr. Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	8885
Pensions		Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	8886
Mr. Benoit	8871	Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	8886
Air Canada		Mr. Christopherson	8887
Mr. Lamoureux	8871	Mr. Dechert	8888
Pensions		Mr. Malo	8889
Mr. Lamoureux	8871	Ms. Deschamps	8889
Child Pornography		Mr. Maloway	8890
Mr. Fast	8871	Mr. Malo	8891
Questions on the Order Paper		Mr. André	8891
Mr. Obhrai	8872	Mr. Maloway	8892
		Mr. Malo	8892
		Mr. Wallace	8893
		Mr. Malo	8894
		Mr. Masse	8894
		Mr. Génèreux	8895
		Mr. Bachand	8896

Mr. Payne	8896
Mr. Bachand	8896
Mr. Gravelle	8898
Mr. Desnoyers	8898
Mr. Maloway	8898
Mrs. Freeman	8898
Mr. Del Mastro	8899
Ms. Brunelle	8900
Mrs. Mendes	8900

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

International Women's Week	
Mrs. O'Neill-Gordon	8901
Pickering	
Mr. Holland	8901
Canadian Jewish Congress	
Mr. Bachand	8901
Official Languages	
Mr. Godin	8901
Citizen Awards	
Mr. Payne	8902
Egypt	
Mrs. Crombie	8902
Anti-Semitism	
Mrs. Wong	8902
Tibet	
Mr. Dorion	8902
Israeli Apartheid Week	
Mr. Lunney	8902
Canadian Jewish Congress	
Mr. Cotler	8903
The Budget	
Mr. Gourde	8903
Liberal Party of Canada	
Mr. Bezan	8903
Canadian Jewish Congress	
Mr. Mulcair	8903
Quebec's Anglophone Minority	
Mr. Nadeau	8904
Conduct of the Government	
Mrs. Mendes	8904
Canadian Jewish Congress	
Mr. Reid	8904

ORAL QUESTIONS

Government Accountability	
Mr. Ignatieff	8904
Mr. Baird	8904
Mr. Ignatieff	8904
Mr. Baird	8904

National Defence	
Mr. Ignatieff	8905
Mr. Baird	8905
Mr. LeBlanc	8905
Mr. Hawn	8905
Mr. LeBlanc	8905
Mr. Hawn	8905

International Co-operation	
Mr. Duceppe	8905
Ms. Oda	8905
Mr. Duceppe	8906
Mr. Paradis	8906

Political Financing	
Ms. Gagnon	8906
Mr. Flaherty	8906
Ms. Gagnon	8906
Mr. Poilievre	8906

Government Accountability	
Mr. Layton	8906
Mr. Baird	8906
Mr. Layton	8906
Mr. Baird	8906
Mr. Layton	8907
Mr. Baird	8907

Government Spending	
Ms. Coady	8907
Mr. Flaherty	8907
Mr. Rodriguez	8907
Mr. Flaherty	8907

Former Public Sector Integrity Commissioner	
Mr. D'Amours	8907
Mr. Day	8907
Mr. D'Amours	8907
Mr. Day	8907
Ms. Faille	8908
Mr. Day	8908
Ms. Faille	8908
Mr. Day	8908

Canada Revenue Agency	
Mr. Carrier	8908
Mr. Ashfield	8908
Mr. Carrier	8908
Mr. Ashfield	8908

Citizenship and Immigration	
Mr. Oliphant	8908
Mr. Kenney	8908
Mr. Oliphant	8908
Mr. Kenney	8909

Political Financing	
Ms. Hall Findlay	8909
Mr. Poilievre	8909
Ms. Hall Findlay	8909
Mr. Poilievre	8909

The Economy	
Mr. Cannan.....	8909
Ms. Ambrose.....	8909
National Defence	
Mr. Harris (St. John's East).....	8909
Mr. Hawn.....	8910
Mr. Mulcair.....	8910
Mr. Hawn.....	8910
Employment Insurance	
Mr. Lessard.....	8910
Ms. Finley.....	8910
Forestry Industry	
Mr. Bouchard.....	8910
Mr. Lebel.....	8910
International Co-operation	
Mr. Rae.....	8910
Ms. Oda.....	8910
Mr. Rae.....	8911
Ms. Oda.....	8911
Natural Resources	
Mr. Cullen.....	8911
Mr. Paradis.....	8911
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre).....	8911
Mr. Paradis.....	8911
Pensions	
Mrs. Gallant.....	8911
Mr. Clement.....	8911
Government Communications	
Ms. Folco.....	8911
Mr. Day.....	8912
Public Safety	
Mr. Lemay.....	8912
Mr. Toews.....	8912
Official Languages	
Mr. Godin.....	8912
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam).....	8912
Government Priorities	
Mr. Hoback.....	8912
Mr. Poilievre.....	8912
Access to Information	
Mrs. Guergis.....	8912
Mr. Baird.....	8912
Presence in Gallery	
The Speaker.....	8913
Business of the House	
Mr. McGuinty.....	8913
Mr. Baird.....	8913
Privilege	
Sit-in at Hill Office of Indian Affairs Minister	
Mr. Duncan (Vancouver Island North).....	8913
Mr. Bagnell.....	8914

Points of Order	
Oral Questions	
Mr. Rafferty.....	8914

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply	
Opposition motion—Conduct of the Government	
Motion.....	8914
Mrs. Mendes.....	8914
Mr. Payne.....	8916
Mr. Lessard.....	8916
Mr. Angus.....	8917
Mr. Simms.....	8917
Mr. Storseth.....	8917
Mr. Lessard.....	8917
Mr. Savage.....	8918
Mr. Calandra.....	8919
Ms. Bonsant.....	8919
Mr. Desnoyers.....	8920
Mr. Angus.....	8921
Mrs. Glover.....	8921
Mr. Asselin.....	8923
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca).....	8923
Mr. Lukiwski.....	8924
Mr. Simms.....	8925
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway).....	8925
Ms. Demers.....	8926
Mrs. Glover.....	8927
Mr. Szabo.....	8927
Mr. Angus.....	8927
Mr. Mulcair.....	8928
Mr. Desnoyers.....	8928
Mr. Dechert.....	8929
Mr. Angus.....	8929
Motion agreed to.....	8931
Message from the Senate	
The Speaker.....	8931

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Competition Act	
Bill C-452. Report stage.....	8931
Mr. Vincent.....	8931
Motion for concurrence.....	8931
(Motion agreed to).....	8931
Mr. Vincent.....	8931
Bill C-452. Third reading.....	8931
Mrs. Hughes.....	8933
Mr. Desnoyers.....	8933
Mr. Wallace.....	8934
Mr. Lamoureux.....	8935
Privilege	
Sit-in at Hill Office of Indian Affairs Minister	
Ms. Ashton.....	8936
Competition Act	
Bill C-452. Third reading.....	8936

Mr. Thibeault.....	8936
Ms. Bonsant.....	8938

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Taxation

Mrs. Hughes.....	8939
------------------	------

Mrs. McLeod.....	8939
------------------	------

Democratic Reform

Mr. Nadeau.....	8940
-----------------	------

Mr. Lukiwski.....	8941
-------------------	------

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