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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, October 5, 2000

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 5, 2000

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

• (1000)

[*English*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Pursuant to section 66 of the Official Languages Act I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the annual report of the Commissioner of Official Languages covering the period between January 1, 1999 and March 31, 2000.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(4)(a), this report is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

ORDER IN COUNCIL APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, a number of order in council appointments recently made by the government.

Pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 110(1) these are deemed referred to the appropriate standing committees, a list of which is attached.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

[*Translation*]

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the government's response to the report tabled on June 1, 2000 by the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. This report is entitled "Seeking a Balance: Final Report on Human Resources Development Canada Grants and Contributions".

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Maurice Dumas (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which represented Canada at the 103rd Inter-Parliamentary Conference, held in Amman, Jordan, from April 30 to May 6, 2000.

• (1005)

[*English*]

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Oak Ridges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the chair of the Canada-Japan Interparliamentary Group annual visit to Diet members, September 4 to 10, 2000.

* * *

MARRIAGE (PROHIBITED DEGREES) ACT

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-501, an act to amend the Marriage (Prohibited Degrees) Act (marriage between persons of the same sex).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of tabling a bill today which would amend federal law to recognize the right of gay and lesbian people to marry. Currently federal common law restricts the institution of marriage to marriage between one man and one woman. This is a clear denial of the right to equality for gay and lesbian people extended under the charter of rights and freedoms which, by the way, was pioneered by the late Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

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The time is long overdue for recognition that the relationships of gay and lesbian people are just as strong, just as loving and just as committed as those of heterosexual couples. The bill in no way diminishes the strength of heterosexual marriage. It does not in any way affect the religious status of marriage. It would amend federal law to ensure full equality for gay and lesbian couples and to extend to those of us who are involved in relationships the right to marry under federal law.

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

The Deputy Speaker: Would the hon. member for Saskatoon—Humboldt tell the Chair which of the bills standing in his name on the order paper he is proposing to introduce?

Mr. Jim Pankiw: Mr. Speaker, I gave notice of this on Friday. I am not sure exactly what number has been assigned to it. It is an act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act.

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to inform the hon. member that the only bills we have on notice at the moment are an act to amend the Canada Elections Act (hours of polling in Saskatchewan) and an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act and the Canada Elections Act (fixed election dates).

I understand that notice may have been given yesterday of a bill and if that is the case it would not be on the order paper for introduction until tomorrow.

I am told the hon. member did file his notice on Friday last, after 2.30. Because the notice time had closed and since the House did not sit on Monday or Tuesday it does not count as notice time, so he has to wait the appropriate time. It counts as having been delivered yesterday for that purpose because he was too late on the Friday. That is why there is this delay. He will be able to do it tomorrow.

Mr. Jim Pankiw: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I realize now what has happened. Obviously as a result of the death of a former Prime Minister the House did not sit on Monday and Tuesday, so that is why this has happened. Rather than having to wait until tomorrow, I wonder if I could have unanimous consent of the House to introduce it today in light of the circumstances.

• (1010)

The Deputy Speaker: Does the House give its consent for the hon. member to proceed with the introduction of this bill?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, I rise today, as I did yesterday, to seek unanimous consent to adopt without debate Motion No. 37, which would seek concurrence in the second report

of the official languages joint committee, encouraging that the city of Ottawa, the capital of Canada, be officially bilingual.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the adoption of Motion No. 37 standing under government orders on the order paper?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Jim Pankiw: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Unanimous consent was denied to my request to introduce a bill today, but I believe that the hon. member who denied it may have misunderstood. In any case, I believe I do now have unanimous consent of the House to introduce the bill today.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent of the House to proceed with the bill at this time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS ACT

Mr. Jim Pankiw (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-502, an act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act (work for welfare).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleagues for extending me the courtesy of introducing this bill today. The purpose of the bill is to require that every province will have in effect a work for welfare program.

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Peter Mancini (Sydney—Victoria, NDP) moved that the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, presented on Wednesday, June 7, 2000, be concurred in.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move concurrence in that report and by way of background to indicate exactly why I am doing that. I have very real concerns. I know those concerns would be shared by other members of the justice committee, and certainly by other members of my party.

In June of this year the justice committee met to discuss a private member's bill dealing with the Westray mine disaster. The justice committee considered that bill. A motion was moved by me. A great deal of work was done by the hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough. There has been a great deal of work done on this bill by the leader of my party, the hon. member for Halifax,

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and by the hon. member for Churchill in Manitoba. This issue is not just an Atlantic issue. It crosses all lines. There has also been a great deal of work done by the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre, our justice critic.

At the justice committee there was a rare and I think unique feeling when the committee determined that the justice department should bring back to the committee a bill giving substance to the spirit of the report filed after the Westray disaster.

There are rules that determine when the minister can respond to that motion from the justice committee. There is no requirement for an election for another year and a half. I am concerned, and I know my concern would be shared by other members of the House, that if an election were called and the House did not proceed to its full mandate this most important issue would die on the order paper. We would have to begin all over again in a new parliament, seeking to give life and legislation to the spirit of the report of Justice Richard and to bring justice to the families of those involved in the Westray mine disaster.

• (1015)

I do not need to repeat the history of that unfortunate day in Nova Scotia and, indeed, that unfortunate day in Canada. I will for the record indicate the brief facts.

As many members who have followed this debate will know and as many members who have led and allowed their names to stand as movers and supporters of this bill will know, it was on May 9, 1992 that the Westray mine exploded, killing 26 miners. The coal mine in Pictou was officially opened eight months earlier. Federal financial assistance was approved which permitted the project to proceed. There were very real questions surrounding the operation of that mine.

After the explosion on December 1, 1997, and after five and a half years of work, a four volume report was produced from the Westray mine public inquiry, entitled "The Westray Story: A Predictable Path to Disaster". The report was scathing. Comments have been made by myself and by other members who have spoken in support of some kind of legislation that would prevent the same kind of thing from happening again.

I will quote, as I have before, from the words of Mr. Justice K. Peter Richard. He said "the Westray story is a story of incompetence, of mismanagement, of bureaucratic bungling, of deceit, of ruthlessness, of cover-up, of apathy, of expediency and of cynical indifference".

The fundamental and basic responsibility for the safe operation of an underground coal mine, and indeed of any industrial undertaking, rests clearly with management. In this disaster there is no question that these labourers went underground into a situation where they ought not to have gone and they paid with their lives.

There is no question that if this act had been done by an individual there would have been a charge of homicide. Because it is a corporation and because of all kinds of legal implications coming from that, justice has never been achieved.

In his report, Justice Richard recommended very clearly that there be a new criminal offence that would impose criminal liabilities on directors and other responsible corporate agents for failing to ensure that their corporation maintained an appropriate standard of occupational health and safety in the workplace, that there be a criminal offence of corporate killing.

We know the statistics. We know that almost 10,000 workers die every year as a result of their work and possibly because of corporate negligence. We know that three workers are injured every day on the job site. From the time the justice committee met in June until today, how many months, how many lives how much corporate irresponsibility have taken place? No mechanism exists in the criminal code for the courts to deal with this in the way that Justice Richard envisioned as a result of the Westray mine disaster.

I know that members from the United Steelworkers were at the justice committee hearing. They have done a tremendous amount of work on this bill. They have provided background notes. They have had legal counsel work on the bill. Everyone who was in the room the day the justice committee met was impressed with the spirit of co-operation from all parties that asked the Minister of Justice to bring forward legislation. It was a most amazing day. This crossed party lines. The member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough worked very closely with us on this issue. The chair of the justice committee was moved by the testimony he heard from families who had been affected by the Westray mine disaster. Coming out of this was a moment when partisanship was put aside in the name of justice.

We face the prospect of losing, if not today perhaps in the next week or two, the momentum and the opportunity to have legislation brought forward if parliament prorogues and an election is called.

• (1020)

Today I am rising to remind the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Labour and members of the House of the importance of this legislation. It has been literally years in the making. It has taken the blood, the sweat and the tears of the families of the Westray miners to bring it this far. It has taken the perseverance of the United Steelworkers. It has taken the putting aside of partisanship by members of parliament.

I would like to hear from the minister, either tomorrow or when the House resumes on October 16, some indication that before an election is called—and I have indicated that there is no need for an election call—the legislation will be brought forward immediately

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to be given passage in the House in whatever form it takes to get it on the books and into the criminal code so we do not lose this opportunity.

I have concerns about that from a number of perspectives. As a lawyer who has dealt with the criminal code and as someone who has been interested in justice for a long time, I have a very real concern that when we have a report that makes a strong recommendation and it is not acted on, then the administration of justice falls into disrepute. Respect for the justice system is a cornerstone of any civilized society.

We now have a situation that cries out for justice. We have done the studies and have finished the report. We have agreement from the parties. We have to give life to that if the public, and especially the workers of this country, is to have respect for the justice system.

I also have concerns about it because I come from a coal mining community. The member who seconded my opportunity to speak today, the member for Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, comes from a coal mining community. In fact, it was the coal miners in our community who went into the Westray mine to retrieve some of the bodies of the workers and who put their own lives at risk for their brothers in the mine. Those people have contacted me and the member for Bras d'Or—Cape Breton and have asked whether there is going to be legislation. They wanted to know if we were going to give life to this legislation so that workers who go down into the mines and workers who put their lives at risk in terms of labour every day would be protected.

Will there be some accounting at the end that says the corporation can be held liable for gross mismanagement, for negligence or, and this is where we take a further step, for malice aforethought, for deliberate actions, knowing that they can result in the loss of life?

I and other members have heard from our constituents and from people across the country who want this legislation passed. I do not think I exaggerate the urgency of bringing this legislation forward in the name of justice, in the name of the Canadian people, in the name of the workers of the Westray mine who lost their lives, and in the name of those people who came before the committee and testified in the most moving way.

I remember when the brother of one of the miners who was killed sat at the table and told his story of his quiet, dignified search for justice. It moved everyone in the committee to the point where we could put aside partisan differences and say that something needed to be done.

What we need to do is amend the criminal code so that corporate executives and directors are held accountable for workplace safety. This is not something foreign. This has been done in other jurisdictions. Such legislation exists in Great Britain and Australia,

and there is a movement in the United States to review it. It is not something that is unfathomable or that has never been done in another jurisdiction. It exists.

• (1025)

There is an opportunity to examine other pieces of legislation. We have done that. I can cite chapter and verse of other legislation in other countries that makes it an offence for corporations to knowingly put the lives of their workers at risk in order to maximize profit, open a mine or make sure that the last shipment of goods gets on the train.

What price do workers in the year 2000 have to pay for corporate profits, and not even for corporate profits sometimes, but just to make sure that the order book is full and the work gets out?

In the Westray mine disaster, the corporation knew there were faults in the mine and knew that the equipment was not working safely, but it put great pressure on the non-unionized workers to go into the mines every day, and the workers went.

Some people have said that the workers had a choice and that they did not have to go. When I hear that I think about all the workers who go out to work every day in order to feed and clothe their children, pay their mortgage and be courageous citizens. That is their priority. They put their lives and safety at risk in order to work. To say that they have a choice, especially in the part of the country that I come from where the unemployment rate is high and the opportunity for work is minimal, is not so easy. To choose not to work is not so easy.

On the Atlantic coast, whether it is in fishing, mining, forestry or farming, we have a history of that kind of dangerous work. The first time I spoke to this bill I talked about what it was like growing up in those communities. What we know from growing up in Nova Scotia is the sound of the whistle when there is a disaster in the mine. We know what it means for the men and women on the fishing boats in the north Atlantic when we look out at the horizon and the storm clouds gather. We know what it is like in the steel mill when there is a catastrophe. We grew up knowing these things.

Accidents can happen as a matter of chance, but when they happen because a corporation has determined that the lives of its workers are not a factor in determining the balance sheet, then it is time for us to say that it is a crime. It is time for us to say that when a corporation knowingly determines to send men and women possibly to their deaths and it has the means to prevent that and does not, it is time for us to say that it is a crime.

I rise today on this motion because we said that in the justice committee. We sent it to the minister and asked for a bill to be brought back that would make it a crime for those directors and corporations to kill their workers.

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We know we will hear it again today in question period and there will be some banter back and forth about when there will be an election. The Prime Minister may say that we will be in our seats on the 16th, 17th or 18th, but there may be an election call after that. Everybody has his or her own reasons for an election call. I am not afraid of it and am prepared to fight it. However, when we have important pieces of legislation in the making let us not put those pieces of legislation at risk.

I urge the Minister of Justice, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Labour to issue a public statement.

• (1030)

They do not have to because they have a few days before they have to report back to the justice committee. However, in the name of decency, in the names of the members of the justice committee who brought forward a unanimous report and of the witnesses who testified, I ask them to indicate within the next two days whether they will bring forward to the House legislation giving life to the commitment made by the justice committee, by the steelworkers and by the families of the miners who went underground and lost their lives. Anything less is negligence and arrogance on the part of the government.

We know this legislation is needed. That is not contested. We know this legislation is important. That is not contested. We know the legislation can be brought into effect. That is not contested. Why wait? Let us do it. We will have other legislation pushed through the House before an election call. The government has no hesitation about pushing through its EI changes. The government may have no hesitation to put through its health accord. In the name of decency, let us bring forward a bill that we can all agree needs to be enacted and give life to the Westray legislation.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, again my hon. colleague from Sydney—Victoria on the beautiful island of Cape Breton has given one of the more eloquent speeches the House has ever heard in the history of parliament.

The hon. member comes from the coal mining area of Cape Breton. If people across the country, especially the government and the official opposition, listen to what he said about decency and the protection of workers, by the time 5 p.m. today there is a good chance that three more Canadians will be killed on the job. That is most unfortunate and is an alarming statistic.

Bill S-20 is coming from the Senate on tobacco legislation and Imperial Tobacco seems to be 100% behind it. However, we have not heard anything about what corporations or multinationals think about this particular bill. Could the hon. member speak on the

multinationals who support the Liberal Party and the Canadian Alliance? Does he suggest that they may be against the bill in order to account for themselves when it comes to this type of action?

Mr. Peter Mancini: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question and I am thankful for the compliment.

I have not heard a response from corporations or the multinationals with regard to the Westray legislation nor do I think any other member of the justice committee has heard one. If they have, I have not been apprised of that.

They are silent because there is a recognition that this may change the way corporations do business to some extent. I do not want to use a broad brush to paint every corporation. There are some corporations that take the safety of their employees very seriously. They are to be applauded. They have nothing to fear from this legislation. There are some employers and corporations that work with the unions to negotiate collective agreements and health and safety standards. They have nothing to fear from this legislation and they should be congratulated for that.

It is corporations like the owners of the mine in Westray who, if there were any question about the owners' culpability in this, not only sent these men to their deaths but evaded the justice system. They refused to testify at a public inquiry. They hid behind jurisdictional questions of warrants to demand their appearance. The managers of that mine did everything possible not just to evade responsibility but to refuse to testify to help shed light on how the tragedy happened.

• (1035)

Those are the corporations, the managers and the directors who have something to fear from this legislation, as well they should. I think many of the corporations have been silent in that regard because that may be the kind of management they want. It would be most helpful, and I suppose it would help the corporate image, if those companies that believe in workers' safety came forward and said they were prepared to support the legislation. However, we have not heard that yet. I issue the challenge to every chamber of commerce in the country to read the proposed Westray bill and indicate their support and their citizen obligation.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I very much support and attach myself to the comments made by the member for Sydney—Victoria. I know that he has a very innate personal interest in this, as was apparent by his remarks.

This is a matter which unfortunately could be put on the slate as more unfinished business on the part of the government. We have seen many indications that the coming days and weeks may result

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in an election call. This is an election call that I think a growing number of Canadians are looking at with a great deal of cynicism. They are viewing this as merely opportunistic, something that is being driven by polls rather than by public commitment and a commitment to complete very important pieces of legislation.

This is but one among many. We know that there is a health accord which was ratified by the provinces and is supposed to in some small measure address the crisis in our health care system. That legislation is a postdated cheque which will never be cashed if the House is dissolved for a general election.

There is important legislation pertaining to the criminal code, the youth criminal justice act, which is badly in need of fixing or replacing. We know the government gave a commitment over seven years ago to do something about that legislation. However, we are on the possible eve of an election and it has not been done. That promise has not been kept or fulfilled.

There are numerous pieces of important legislation regarding the environment, health care, justice and taxation. There are important legislative initiatives which do receive support from the opposition. They will simply die on the order paper. Canadians need to understand that. The initiatives will go to the Senate, if they pass through the House, and will be gassed. They will not see the light of day. These are hollow promises. If the government is to point to this legislation as something which has been fulfilled, it is dead wrong.

This particular debate that was brought about by the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria deals with Motion No. 79, which was moved by the Progressive Conservative Party. It called upon the government to respond to the recommendations of the Westray report by Mr. Justice Peter Richard on the tragic event in Plymouth, Nova Scotia when the Westray mine exploded killing 26 men.

That poignant moment resulted in the renewed discussion about workplace safety, the renewed focus on how we could try to prevent such disasters and how, through legislation, we could bring about greater accountability and responsibility.

Not all disasters are preventable. Arguably and quite rightly, this is one that most agree could have been avoided by taking proper steps to ensure the safety of those workers who went down into the mine was protected and that all the necessary steps had been taken by the management and the province, which oversaw the safety of the workplace environment. It could have been avoided if those parties had taken real cautions to ensure that a dangerous workplace environment did not exist. Sadly, that did not happen.

There has already been much discussion on Motion No. 79 in this place which was a carry-over from a previous parliament before prorogation. It gave members of the House the opportunity to put forward their positions and their party's position. Initially, members of the government were very reluctant to embrace even

the idea of bringing this matter to the public debate. They were very reluctant to discuss it. They did not want this matter to go to the justice committee, where it eventually did aspire. When it got there, as was alluded to by the member for Sydney—Victoria, there was an incredible catharsis. There was suddenly a change on the part of the government in its willingness to discuss this issue. It was very heartening and encouraging to see that happen because it washed away some of the partisanship and politics involved in workplace safety and in this type of issue.

● (1040)

Let us make no mistake about this. This is a human issue. This is an issue that touches lives and potentially takes lives if we do not act. The indication that we heard from many of the witnesses was that shocking numbers of people are killed and injured in the workplace every day. Not all of that is preventable and we would be naive to suggest otherwise. However, the reality is that much of it is preventable. Much of what has to change and evolve as a result of initiatives from this place is the attitude and the thinking on the part of corporations and people who have the final say over the setting of rules and regulations within the workplace.

How do we do that? Part of the solution lies in changes to the criminal code which will bring about a sense of accountability and will in instances where there is neglect and obvious situations being ignored, bring about some form of accountability, deterrence and denunciation. All of this is in the name of public protection and in the name of prevention.

This is a mother's milk type of issue and one that everyone can agree on. Yet we do not seem to have the inner fortitude or the ability to mobilize to get this matter moving in terms of legislation. We had that unique opportunity at the justice committee as was referred to. There was a very real significant move in the room. I was in that justice committee and felt it as well. There was a genuine intent that we would move forward. Sadly, that seems to be lost. Like many of the other initiatives we have seen, it stands there on the precipice ready to take that leap yet, cynically, all of that is cast aside.

We have an opportunity to salvage that. We can ask for and rightly so expect that the government will now take the initiative and bring about legislation. The justice department should have been clearly instructed. The intent was there. The intent of parliament was what led this motion to get to the justice committee. Then it continued, it snowballed and we did hear testimony from the United Steelworkers.

We heard the testimony of Howard Sim and Vernon Theriault. Mr. Theriault was part of the heroic effort by draggersmen from Cape Breton, Pictou county and surrounding areas who went down into the mine with the hope that some life had survived the tragic and massive explosion in Plymouth. That is the sort of human spirit

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that should inspire us to keep the dream alive of somehow bringing about improved laws and legislation. It is not the total answer by any means but it certainly moves the yardsticks and takes us forward in a futuristic way.

We hear the rhetoric. We hear constant references that we have to do this and that this is the underpinning of parliamentary democracy. We hear some party members, the Liberal Party members in particular, very cynically indicating that they are the only ones who speak out for Canadians. That is not the case. It is completely cynical to suggest that this party, this natural governing party as it likes to refer to itself, is the only one speaking out for the interests of Canadians.

We are faced with an issue of complete moral duty when we talk about protecting lives and workplace safety. It is something so fundamental. When people get up in the morning and go out the door to their workplace, whether it is into a factory or on a trawler or in the woods or into a mine or an office building, it is not too much for them to expect or hope that they will be able to return to their homes safely that evening to be with their loved ones. Surely that is not something which should be too much for any Canadian to expect. Yet we are tasked in this place with trying to ensure that is just what happens.

• (1045)

Obviously there are workplaces that are more dangerous than others, but there are natural consequences that can flow from putting oneself in harm's way. I think particularly of firemen and police officers for whom it is implicit in their job descriptions that they may find themselves in danger. We should be looking constantly for ways to improve safety and protection of human life. We can do that through legislation to a large extent.

That is all. That is the simple, fundamental goal we are seeking, all members of parliament across party lines, across the floor, and we hope not too many more will cross the floor. This is something that is most serious and most timely. The easy thing to do would be to do nothing. The easy thing to do would be to simply bump along.

It is an aberration when we see bold moves from the Liberal government. It has inherited a healthy economy, or at least an economy that has stabilized, much as a result of a prior government's economic planning, plans and legislative initiatives, bold and unpopular as they were. When I say unpopular, members of the same Liberal government while in opposition chastised and absolutely railed against those initiatives. However, through the glass ceiling of hypocrisy we have seen that attitude change. They have embraced and called their own the same legislative initiatives they railed against.

Not to digress on that record, to look at this issue with anything other than a humanistic, impartial eye is a derogation of our responsibility. We must encourage the Minister of Justice and her department. I would suggest it is broader than just looking at criminal code amendments. The issue goes beyond simply suggesting that changing one provision or one section of the criminal code will provide the answers. We have to look at labour laws. We have to look at occupational health and safety. We have to include the provinces to ensure that there is the same standard.

When I talk of standards I talk of the health care issue we will be debating at some point in the very near future. Again, it is spurred very much in its timing because of a looming election. Health care is not fixed. Let us be clear about that. The government is putting back a portion of the money removed since it took office. It is putting back a small portion that in many ways pales by comparison to what was removed. It reminds me of Freddy Krueger offering a band-aid to one of his victims after he slashed them.

Canadians are tired of that type of cynicism. They want to see action. They want to see real action, not just the perception of action and talk of action. The government has not lived up to its commitment in that regard.

It has talked a great talk. It has given very much the perception and feeling to Canadians that health care is fixed, that the criminal code has been fixed and that taxation is under control. That is not the case. One only has to visit a local hospital, to talk to individuals who are struggling to get by, to talk to a student who is saddled with a huge student loan and debt and has to leave the country to find work, or to talk to individuals who are doing their very best as single parents to get by on seasonal employment and face horrendous cuts to seasonal unemployment insurance.

With all this coming to fruition and with people struggling out there, the government says that it will help. By the way, since Canadians will be going to the polls very soon, the government wants to remind them that it is helping them. It asks them to forget about the fact that it is the one who put them in the situation. It is now ready to throw a rope and pull them ashore. It sees that they are drowning and it will now throw a rope. They are only being pulled halfway ashore.

What Canadians want to ask themselves is whom do they trust to be on the other end of the rope. Which national leader do they want to be pulling them in as they are drowning? Do they trust the person on the other end of that rope? I would suggest there is only one leader in this place that should earn and has deservedly earned the trust of Canadians, and that is the Right Hon. Joe Clark. He has always done what he said he would do. When we talk about trust in government—

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• (1050)

The Deputy Speaker: I know the hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough meant the right hon. member for Kings—Hants. I know he would want to be sure to use the name of his riding. Perhaps he has forgotten the right hon. member is now a member of the House and must be referred to by his proper title.

Mr. Peter MacKay: In my enthusiasm I may have misspoken. When we say Joe who, we all know who now. The right hon. member for Kings—Hants has a long record of public service and a long record of honesty and integrity which I think is recognized and acknowledged by all members in this place.

This issue is one that will not go away. Whether it dies in this legislative attempt by members of the opposition, or whether it is embraced and rallied forward by the government, it is not an issue that will go away any time soon, nor will the problems in health or the problems in our economy.

Canadians expect that members of parliament, and in particular the Prime Minister, are here to lead. We heard a great deal about leaders and leadership in the past number of days. To be a leader one needs vision. That seems to be what is lacking in this place and in this current government.

There is no vision. The government bumps along and reacts to crisis. When the wheels are off it offers some support, some comfort. To prevent future problems, to somehow lay out a plan that will address problems before they happen, is the particular issue we are focused on in this debate. In terms of workplace safety, how do we put in place legislation that will save lives and prevent injury?

Let us look at the full equation. When these types of things happen there is a huge economic impact as well. Not to be callous or take away from the human impact, but when companies are forced to shut down, when persons are out of the workplace and compensation is due and deserved, when lives are lost and families are then faced with the horrible hardships that result from that type of situation, there is economic impact, that is something that is borne by all Canadians. We are lucky to have a social system that reacts, sometimes inadequately, but it is there to help.

If we can prevent these tragedies, if we can prevent this type of lasting harm to humans, the human impact and the economic impact that results, why would we not do that? We have lots of time. We do not need to go headlong rushing into an election. We have plenty of time to react. We have unfinished work, unfinished business before the House. Let us take the time. Let us sit on the weekend if we have to. Let us get legislation done. Let us get the work done that people have entrusted us to do.

The motion brought forward by the Progressive Conservative Party did get to the justice committee. It did bring about a raised awareness and a consciousness on the part of people in this place

and people across the country toward the issue. There was a willingness to act at that point.

The only thing that is preventing that now, the only impediment is the government's timetable and, I would add to that, its priorities, which seem to be very much out of sync with the priorities of others in the opposition and most Canadians.

The Westray mine sits silent. The assets are being liquidated. Yet that memory is still very poignant in Pictou county, in the province of Nova Scotia and around the country. The Westray mine has become a symbol of the tragedy and the horror that can take place when unsafe work conditions exist. It has become a symbol for every type of work. Let us not let that tragedy repeat itself. Let us not let those lives that were lost be in vain. Let us not let the heroic efforts that were made in the wake of the Westray mine disaster go unnoticed and unsubstantiated by efforts to prevent. We do have a chance to do that now.

• (1055)

My friend spoke of the legal implications, the malice aforethought, the callous approach and the grindings of the justice system that resulted in the aftermath of Westray. Civil implications were pursued. What was particularly striking, which doubled and exacerbated and made worse the Westray disaster, was the disaster which occurred in the legal system and the wranglings that took place. We have to try to cut through that.

Why would we not try to streamline efforts in our justice system to address issues quickly and in a timely fashion so that justice is done, seen to be done and truly done? That was one of the many lessons that came from Westray.

We have a chance now to act as my friend indicated. We urge the government and the Minister of Justice and her department to respond quickly. Let us not rush headlong into an election. Let us do the important work we are elected to do. Westray will always be a reminder. Let us learn from those mistakes and move forward.

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I found the hon. member's statement very interesting. I read the motion in some detail as the member was speaking and I would like him to clarify something for me.

The motion states that in the opinion of the House the criminal code or other appropriate federal statutes should be amended. That is a pretty broad request. It does not specify whether it is the criminal code that is to be amended or whether it is to be some other corporate legislation or some other justice legislation.

I was particularly impressed by his reference that we must make sure that justice is done. I could not agree more. Justice is what we want in Canada, and in particular the liability of directors. There is

a provision today in legislation about the liability of directors who do not do their job and things of this sort.

Is it really amendments to the criminal code that should be studied or other legislation? Could the hon. member give some clarification as to exactly what he intends?

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the member has made an important point that deserves clarification. The criminal code as indicated is but one aspect. It is about liability. It is about the use of the civil code to pierce the corporate veil.

If the chain of evidence is unbroken and if there is clear indication that safety provisions have been ignored and a person has been placed in a situation where there is real danger that was avoidable, directors and those in managerial positions should face a degree of accountability. If a stream of evidence pointed directly to knowledge that was ignored, if a dangerous situation could have been remedied and a decision very often for financial reasons led the person to inaction, there should definitely be a degree of accountability. All these evidentiary matters would be examined by a court with the benefit of the presumption of innocence and all the protections that exist.

What other types of legislative initiatives can we look at? We could look at coal mine regulations which are within federal purview. Occupational health and safety is another area that we could look at. Other federal labour codes that exist in the country could be looked at. The difficulty with much of this is provincial standards and the provincial approach to safety in the workplace. It is very much in the hands of the provinces to regulate.

We need federal statutes and legislation that encourage accountability, that encourage liability, and that will bring about a sense that there will be an accounting and deterrence and denunciation of irresponsible behaviour by those who not only in the practical sense may have created a dangerous situation but those who knew of it.

• (1100)

That is what I mean when I talk about attitudes changing. For years it has been assumed that those in the upper echelon in the business world, those who in many instances drive businesses to move ahead at breakneck pace, will not be held accountable, that they will somehow be able to step back and say "I just make business decisions". Business decisions affect lives and business decisions, if they are driven only by profit, certainly create danger. That is what we learned at Westray, just as political decisions can very much create danger.

If this is truly to be about accountability and justice, that means many things to many people. Justice very much talks about fairness. It talks about accountability. It talks about openness. That is what we should all be striving for. That is what we can do by changing things in the legislative scheme in parliament.

Routine Proceedings

Mrs. Michelle Dockrill (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand in this Chamber today and talk about the motion put forward by my colleague from Sydney—Victoria.

It is fitting that we are having this discussion today. Over the last seven days, day after day, minute after minute, Canadians have talked about what former Prime Minister Trudeau left Canadians. They talked about his legacy. They talked about his love for all Canadians and his belief in justice for all Canadians.

What have we become as a country when we are unwilling to place a value on human lives? That is what we are talking about. We are talking about individuals day in and day out whose very lives are put in jeopardy because of corporations' race to the bottom.

What are we asking for? We are asking for the recognition for responsible corporations. But as I have heard the hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough say, what is the rush? Is there an election? This is about morality. This is about us as parliamentarians and our responsibility. I believe we have a responsibility to the workers in this country to recognize the value of their lives. All we are asking is that corporations be held accountable and responsible.

I come from a part of the country that has been known on a number of occasions to have deaths occur specifically in the coal mines. While some are workplace related, they are due to the very essence of the job. When people sit and read the Westray story as I have a number of times, it should send shivers through the spine of every Canadian. Those 26 lives should have been protected. Their deaths could have been prevented in the wonderful race to the bottom.

We have become a society that looks upon its citizens as mere vehicles and not human beings. As Canadians have clearly said with respect to the legislation, we have a responsibility. We as parliamentarians have a responsibility to say that we want corporations to be accountable and we want them to be responsible if they play a role in the deaths of their workers.

• (1105)

That is exactly how simple this is. It is not complicated. Contrary to what the government would like Canadians to believe, that is exactly what this is about. It is about saying to companies across the country that they have a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of their workers.

As the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough said, I believe it is our responsibility as parliamentarians and Canadians to make sure that the deaths of those 26 men were not in vain, not only for us as Canadians but for their children. We must show their children that their dads did not die in vain, that we as parliamentarians and Canadians have learned a valuable lesson because of those

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deaths, and that we remain committed to doing everything we possibly can to make sure that deaths like those are not repeated again. If they are, then those who are responsible have to be held accountable. That is our job.

I go back to my first comment, for all of us in the House to take a minute today and ask ourselves what are we really doing here when we are not willing to stand and say as Canadians and as a government that we value our workers. That is what this is about. It is about values. Let us show some values as they relate to Canadians. Let the government show how it values workers.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[Translation]

PETITIONS

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to table in the House three new petitions concerning employment insurance. In all, they bear the signatures of 1,880 constituents in the riding of Charlevoix.

Since the Minister of Human Resources Development is merely deferring the problem of seasonal work by gradually implementing the changes to the regional employment insurance boundaries over the next three years, the people of Charlevoix continue to pressure the government.

The petitioners therefore call upon parliament to maintain the status quo, so that the counties of Manicouagan and Charlevoix continue to be part of the old northern Quebec region or be added to

the new north western Quebec region, in order to maintain the same calculation rate for employment insurance.

• (1110)

[English]

IRAQ

Hon. Christine Stewart (Northumberland, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from several constituents who call upon the Parliament of Canada to accept the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade for the lifting of sanctions with regard to Iraq. They demand the immediate cessation of bombing and call for serious peace negotiations. They urge that Canada and the United Nations vastly increase efforts to provide food, medicine and funds for infrastructure reconstruction in Iraq. Further they ask that the compensation fund taken from the oil for food program be suspended.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from hundreds of my constituents who are shocked by the legal determination that the possession of child pornography is not criminal. They ask that the House do everything necessary to make sure that the possession of child pornography remains a serious criminal offence.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present a petition signed by hundreds of constituents and residents from the city of Winnipeg generally around the critical issue of health care. It is a very timely petition given the debate upon which we are about to embark in the Chamber today.

The petitioners call upon the government to address the crisis in health care, to take decisive leadership not only with respect to funding but with respect to the future of medicare and the growing threat of privatization. Interestingly, for purposes of the government's bill, they call upon the government to increase the share of the federal government's funding for health care to 25% immediately and to implement a national home care and pharmacare program.

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. John Solomon (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present pursuant to Standing Order 36 a petition signed by Canadian citizens from Edmonton, Leduc, Stony Plain, Fredericton, New Brunswick, from my constituency of Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre and from other parts of the country.

This petition is being presented today in light of the fact that the CBC has been gutted by the Liberal government. It has taken over \$400 million per year from the CBC and actually is helping to destroy the national fabric of our country. The petitioners ask parliament and the Liberal government to reconsider this short-sightedness and to restore adequate funding to the CBC to allow the maintenance and improvement of current local television news while improving the network for all Canadians.

THE SENATE

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present eight separate petitions on behalf of the people of Dauphin—Swan River.

The first petition calls on the government when selecting a candidate for the Senate to respect the democratic right of Manitoba to elect its own senator.

SNOWBIRDS AIR SQUADRON

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls upon parliament to allow the continuation of Canadian forces Snowbirds 431 air demonstration squadron through both funding and legislation.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the next petition calls upon the government to ensure emergency compensation be immediately delivered to farmers who have not been served by AIDA and immediately launch an international campaign against foreign subsidies.

GUN CONTROL

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the next petition calls on parliament to repeal gun control Bill C-68 and to redirect the hundreds of millions of dollars to education and health care.

HEPATITIS C

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the next petition requests that parliament revisit the issue of hepatitis C compensation and that the government offer a fair, compassionate and humane compensation package to all who received infected blood.

GRAIN TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the next petition calls on parliament to advise the government to mandate the Canadian Wheat Board to deliver its grain shipment to the port that offers the most advantageous cost to producers.

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CANADA PENSION PLAN

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition which requests that the government amend the Canada pension plan to create a separate disability plan to ensure the long term sustainability of the CPP and the financial security of both seniors and disabled persons.

TAXATION

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in the last petition the petitioners call upon parliament to give Canadian taxpayers a break by instituting tax relief of at least 25% in federal taxes over the next three years starting with the next federal budget.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1115)

[English]

CANADA HEALTH CARE, EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING ACT

Hon. Jim Peterson (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-45, an act respecting the provision of increased funding for health care services, medical equipment, health information and communications technologies, early childhood development and other social services and to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is truly a great honour for me to present for second reading Bill C-45, the Canada health care, early childhood development and other social services funding act.

The legislation stems directly from the historic landmark agreement reached by Canada's first ministers on September 11 in our nation's capital. I say landmark because the meeting involved 14 governments of different political affiliations and ideologies collectively agreeing on a plan to renew health care, to improve the support system for early childhood development and to strengthen our other social programs.

As its contribution to these agreements the federal government is providing \$23.4 billion in new federal investments. Most important, the first ministers committed to the key goals of Canada's health system for the future, namely to preserve, protect and improve the health of Canadians, to ensure that Canadians have timely access to health services anywhere in Canada based on need, not on ability to pay, and to ensure the long term sustainability of the health system so that care services will be available to all Canadians in future years.

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It is important to note that the first ministers gave Canadians their commitment to strengthen and renew health care services through partnership and collaboration, with the federal government as an equal partner in this renewal.

[*Translation*]

An agreement was also reached in the area of early childhood development. I should point out that while the premier of Quebec has expressed some reservations about this agreement, he shares the same concerns and principles as his counterparts regarding early childhood development.

[*English*]

The bill implements four federal funding commitments in support of the agreement. First, it increases the Canada health and social transfer by an additional \$21.1 billion to provide the provinces and territories with stable, predictable and growing funding over the next five years, funding for health, post-secondary education, early childhood development and other social programs. Of this \$21.1 billion, \$2.2 billion will be invested in early childhood development.

Second, the accord provides that \$1 billion will go to a new medical equipment fund to enable provinces and territories to purchase modern, much needed diagnostic and other medical equipment. These funds will be available as soon as the bill is passed.

Third, we are investing \$500 million in an independent agency mandated to accelerate the adoption of modern information and communications technologies, including electronic patient records to provide better health care to every one of us.

Fourth, \$800 million will go to the health transition fund to support innovation and reform in the area of primary health care.

[*Translation*]

As members know, the federal government, along with the provinces and territories, plays a supportive role for the health system and other social programs.

• (1120)

The provinces and territories offer their own health care, education and social services. Federal transfers bring a growing financial contribution to these basic programs and the federal government abides by the principles of the Canada Health Act, to which all the premiers reiterated their support in that historical agreement.

[*English*]

Prior to this accord on September 11 the transfers to the provinces were at an all time high. For the CHST it was \$30.8 billion. In addition, we have equalization to the provinces and territories which totals \$10 billion, for a total in transfers to these

other jurisdictions of over \$40 billion. Since this accord, in addition to this \$40 billion we have the additional funds of \$23.4 billion over four years.

Looking at the CHST, which is the largest federal transfer, it provides the provinces and territories with cash payments and tax transfers in support of their social programs. The CHST also gives them the flexibility to design and administer their own programs provided, however, that the principles of the Canada Health Act and the prohibition on residency requirements for social assistance are upheld and respected.

Since 1995 the federal government has strengthened the CHST four times. In the 1996 budget we established an annual CHST cash floor of \$11 billion. The 1998 budget raised the annual CHST cash floor to \$12.5 billion. The 1999 budget announced an additional \$11.5 billion investment over five years in funding specifically for health care. The last budget provided an extra \$2.5 billion in cash over five years for health and post-secondary education.

This \$14 billion funding increase in the last two budgets raised the cash component of the CHST by 25% over its 1998-99 level. It helped the provinces and territories deal with the immediate concerns of Canadians regarding health care, including the problems of waiting lists, crowded emergency rooms and the lack of diagnostic services.

I want to discuss the bill's specific measures in detail. The new funding commitments for the CHST build on the previous increases in the CHST transfers. The \$21.1 billion of additional cash that we bring forward for the CHST provides stable, predictable and growing funding for the CHST over the next five years. This is the largest investment ever made for health, higher education and social services. The provinces and territories can now give top priority to accelerating the changes we need in order to give Canadians the high quality health care they deserve, to provide new supports to early childhood development and to strengthen our other important social programs.

With this additional money, CHST cash transfers to the provinces and territories will rise to \$18.3 billion in 2001-02, to \$19.1 billion in the next year and to \$21 billion in 2005-06. By then CHST cash will be fully 35% above its current level of \$15.5 billion. Moreover the value of the CHST tax points will grow to \$18.8 billion over the next five years. Altogether the federal transfers to the provinces and territories through the CHST for health, post-secondary education and social services will grow to \$40 billion by the year 2005-06.

• (1125)

The current CHST legislative framework will be extended to provide a new five year funding plan and will be extended again in three years to provide an ongoing five year plan. The new funding

commitment establishes an unprecedented planning stability and certainty for the provinces, to allow them to go forth and help renew our health care system.

[*Translation*]

This brings me to the federal government's sizeable investment in early childhood development, which is the focus of this bill.

As members know, the early years are crucial to a child's development. Governments realize that they need to invest in the services that support children during their early years in order to help them reach their full potential.

The federal government has already made a number of major investments in early childhood development through initiatives such as the national child benefit supplement, the Canada child tax benefit, the child care expense deduction, the GST credit and extended EI parental leave for working parents.

The federal, provincial and territorial governments are now involved in an important initiative for early childhood development which would get Canadian children off to a good start in life at a critical stage in their development.

In support of this new initiative, the federal government will contribute \$2.2 billion over the next five years. The governments of the provinces and territories have agreed to use these credits to promote healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy, improve parenting and family supports, strengthen early childhood development, learning and care, and strengthen community supports.

[*English*]

These new investments, together with the incremental investments of the provinces, will provide families with better access to services such as prenatal classes and screening, preschool programs and child care, and parent information and family support.

All governments have agreed to report publicly on what they are doing so that their progress can be tracked by Canadians. Canadians will know how much money is being spent, how well services are being delivered and what this means to the health, well-being and development of our children. Whether through partnership with provincial governments and territories or through federal initiatives, governments are working to ensure that all Canadian children are given the best possible start in life.

On the subject of health renewal, first ministers agreed on a shared vision of health and stated in their final communique:

Canadians will have publicly funded health services that provide quality health care, and that promote the health and well-being of Canadians in a cost effective and fair manner.

The first ministers are committed to strengthening and renewing Canada's health care services through partnership, through collabo-

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ration. They agreed on an action plan that focuses on access to care, health promotion and wellness, primary health care, the supply of doctors, nurses and other health personnel, home care and community care, pharmaceutical management, health information and communications, and health equipment and infrastructure.

Most important, they agreed that all governments must be accountable to Canadians for their health care spending.

• (1130)

As part of those accountability provisions of the agreement, provincial and territorial governments will report on how they have invested these funds in health renewal and medical equipment.

To deal with immediate pressures, the government is providing funds to upgrade medical equipment and invest in new technologies to provide Canadians with more timely access to high quality care. Through this bill the government is investing \$1 billion in a medical equipment fund with which the provinces and territories can acquire and install much needed diagnostic equipment and treatment equipment, such as MRIs and CAT scans, over the next two years. Again governments will be expected to report on how this money is spent. Provinces and territories will be able to draw on these funds as soon as this bill is passed.

The government will also provide \$500 million through an independent corporation which will be mandated to accelerate the development and adoption of modern information communications technology systems such as electronic patient records. This will allow the sector to keep up with other sectors of our economy in adopting the new information and communications technologies. It is a key ingredient to building a health infrastructure in Canada.

More specifically the development of electronic health records will ensure our ability to guarantee Canadians that even with these electronic records, which will do a great deal of good in streamlining the system, there will be stringent measures in place to protect the privacy, confidentiality and security of health care information. Canadians can be assured that their personal health information will be strictly guarded.

This co-ordinated approach has many benefits. Duplication will be reduced. Efficiency in the exchange of information between health care providers will be improved. There will be better access to services and increased service delivery.

In conclusion, Canadians can now be assured of the unwavering commitment of their governments to renewed health care, to support for early childhood development and to support for other social programs. This bill provides CHST funding for the provinces and territories that is growing, stable and predictable so that they can plan for their future. It provides provinces with immediate funding for buying medical diagnostic and treatment equipment. It provides all governments with the funding growth and the stability

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to significantly step up their efforts to renew and modernize Canada's health care services.

Above all, Canadians will have an accountability framework, report cards, to better help them judge the results for themselves of how money on health care, early childhood development and medical equipment is being spent.

In this accord we see 14 governments with shared goals and priorities, 14 governments which have given these measures their blessing. They have made Canada truly work for the benefit of all our citizens. I believe that when history is written it will cite this landmark accord as among the truly great accomplishments of our time.

I believe that history will cite the role of extraordinary leadership provided by our Prime Minister. Without his determination, wisdom and immense ability, this accord, this shared vision of the future of health care for all Canadians with all levels of government working together, would not have been possible. In conclusion, I salute that role of extraordinary leadership.

• (1135)

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I ask leave to share my time with the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the House give its consent for the sharing of time between the hon. members as indicated?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Elk Island will have 20 minutes.

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to enter this debate today because it is an issue of great importance to Canadians. As we rush headlong into an unnecessary and unwarranted election, we are being asked to quickly push the bill through so the Liberals can look a little better than they do right now.

Why is there such a notable health care crisis in this country? Where did it come from? I have been sitting here thinking about the different things that have happened over the last number of years.

I remember way back in 1961, when most of the members in the House were not even born, my brand new wife and I left Saskatchewan, the home of medicare, and moved to Alberta. There was no public health care in Alberta. It was a privately operated system called MSI, Medical Services Incorporated. We paid a small premium every month and received excellent medical care.

Those were the days before the technological on-off switches for having babies, and soon after we were married, within the mandatory 10 months, our first daughter was born. Our new daughter and

her mother received excellent care. I remember being very pleased with the care they received. Later on my wife had some complications and she had to go to Calgary where she received prompt, efficient and excellent care.

I now think back about 20 years, and it is amazing that it is already 20 years, when my dear wife again had a severe medical challenge. It is called cancer. She had a biopsy on Wednesday, a final diagnosis on Friday and surgery on the following Monday. It was amazing, just like that; quick, quick, quick. It worked. That was in 1980.

Now I am told that people with the same kind of medical emergency are on waiting lists for up to four months for the same operation. People with cancer cannot wait. That is deplorable.

I spoke to a young man in my riding not very long ago. Relative to my age he is young but I guess he is old to some of the youngsters in the group here. He has a medical challenge which requires some diagnostics. While he is waiting anxiously, and I must emphasize the word anxiously, the hospital is telling him that he can get in some time near the end of October. It was a couple of weeks ago when I was speaking with him.

There is a crisis in health care. Where did it come from? With all this blowing that the Liberal government wants to do now, where did the crisis come from? I can tell the House where it came from.

I have in my hand here, and I will hold it so that it cannot be seen as a prop, the budget 2000 document that was tabled in the House by the Minister of Finance. It just so happens that in this document the Liberals are bragging about improving the quality of life of Canadians and their children.

I look at this document and I see the amount of cash transfers for health from the federal government to the provinces. In 1993 it was \$18.8 billion. In 1994 it was \$18.7 billion. I will not keep reading the years but the amounts are \$18.8 billion, \$18.7 billion, \$18.5 billion and \$14.7 billion. These figures are right in the minister's own document.

The Liberal government administered cuts to health care and we are surprised that there is a health care crisis. The Liberal government took the money away and now it is giving some of it back and it wants all of us to cheer. It is like the guy who robs me of my wallet and asks me to thank him because he gives me money for bus fare home. It is absurd.

• (1140)

The Liberal government has literally cut billions of dollars out of the health care budget for the provinces. It is administered by the provinces. Now it is gingerly giving some of it back and it wants a bunch of praise because we expect this unanticipated election this fall.

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By the way, just to digress a little, if the election is this fall it will have been called even earlier than the early call in 1997, just a little over three and a half years into the mandate. I do not know whether members are aware of it, but if there is an election every three and a half years instead of every four years, it increases the cost of the elections by over 12%. Why would we not use that money for health care instead of having needless elections? The only purpose of the election is that the Liberals want to get re-elected.

As another aside, I cannot help but mention that this week our party started running some ads. How did we finance them? I and a whole bunch of Canadian Alliance members across the country have donated money to the party in order to run the ads.

I noticed also this week the Liberal Party has started running ads. Who has paid for them? The same guys. We have paid for them because they are tax funded ads with the Government of Canada name on them.

The government is talking about all this wonderful money that it is putting back into health care. I have to be kind, so I will simply say gently that it is a myth. The Liberals have taken so much out and now they are gingerly putting some of it back and they want everyone to cheer and vote for them again. I am offended by that.

As far as I am concerned those ads are inaccurate. They do not communicate truthfully to Canadians what has actually happened. As far as I am concerned they are nothing but blatant election advertising at taxpayers' expense prior to the writ being dropped. I am very offended by that and so should every Canadian be offended by that, because it is so wrong to do that.

I mentioned the numbers. Over the years the government decreased the numbers and then it started adding to them. The Secretary of State for International Financial Institutions, who gave the speech on behalf of the government, talked about the \$11.5 billion which the government put back in. Again that is messaging. It is really gross messaging in terms of shading the truth.

If the government says it is putting in \$11.5 billion, almost all Canadians assume, because we deal with annual budgets, that it is \$11.5 billion per year. Well, it ain't, if I can use that English inaccuracy to make a point. It just ain't true. The fact is \$11.5 billion was projected. Most of it has not been paid yet. It was projected over the next five years, so it is just a little over \$2.5 billion a year.

That is the same as a policeman who stops me for speeding and asks how fast I was going. I could say I was going 400. The purpose of my trip was to go 400 kilometres. If I said that I was going 400 he would give me a whopper of a ticket but actually I was going 100, planning on doing that for four hours and doing my 400 kilometre trip. The same thing is true here. We are talking about rates of expenditure of public money for health care. It is so much per year.

The government is doing the same thing again in Bill C-45, which proposes to put all this extra money into health care. It did it again by saying it is spending \$21.1 billion on health. What a wonderful number. What years are we talking about? It starts on April 1, 2001. The Liberals are going to win an election on it, but they are not even talking about putting any money into health care. They are in other parts of the bill. In the part about the \$21.1 billion, it begins April 1, 2001. The next payment is April 1, 2002, the next April 1, 2003 and then it goes to 2004 and to 2005.

• (1145)

From the years 2001 to 2005, the Liberals are going to put in a total of \$11.2 billion, around \$2 billion to \$2.5 billion a year on average. It is way in the future but they are advertising it on TV as if the money is here now. They are not stating that it is way in the future. They want Canadians simply to be duped into believing that they are doing wonderful things for health care so they will vote for them again because they want power. I find that offensive and we should put an end to it. It is very disturbing to me that this has occurred.

I am not talking too much about the health care system per se because I am primarily a finance critic. However, I would like to talk a bit about the history of the Liberal government. I did a little math. I love math. I get out my calculator and play with numbers for recreation. Other people bore themselves to death by doing things like golfing. I like solving little math problems.

I have already described how since 1993 the funding for health care went down and then went up again. After 2005 it actually will be higher than it was in 1993. However, after 2001, with the total amount of money that will be put into health care, it will still be less than the amount that was being transferred in 1993. It went down so low that this bill will not even bring it up to the 1993 levels.

What I did was take the numbers from 1993 all the way to the projections for 2005, a total of 12 years. I will not read the numbers, but members can check with me later if they want them. I did a calculation to find out how much the amount had increased. By the year 2005 the government will actually be putting in more than in 1993, 12 years earlier.

That works out to an increase of 11.7% over 12 years. That is an average increase, compounded annually, of 0.9%, less than 1% per year. Our population has grown bigger than that. We are falling behind per person. We are putting less and less into health care per capita and the government wants to applaud itself. I am sure that anyone who knows the facts will not applaud. The government needs to applaud itself because that is the only applause it will get, I am sure.

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I cannot help but think about the government's concern for children. It loves to talk about children but it is missing the most important thing. I am very grateful that when our children were young we could afford, with sacrifices, to live on one income. In our family it happened to be that I was chosen to earn the income and my wife was a full time mom. Now two of our children who are married have children. We have four wonderful grandchildren. I am very grateful that they each have a full time mom. I assure members that is not without sacrifice.

The term Liberal government is an oxymoron. Liberal comes from the same root word as liberation and freedom. Instead, the Liberals tax us to death and control our lives. It is shameful. The Liberal government thinks that it does best by taxing people so heavily that both parents have to work, then it wants to be kind and give money back for social services to look after children who really do not have an effective home to live in.

Would it not be better if we so arranged our fiscal affairs that families would be taxed at a level where they could actually afford to make that choice? The operative word is choice. We know that easily two-thirds of families, when given a free choice, would choose to spend time at home with their young children. That is not a choice under the contradictory term of Liberal government. That choice is taken away.

I have to emphasize again that under the programs of the Canadian Alliance, not only would we fund health care adequately, working together with the provinces in harmony, giving them the authority to operate the health care system efficiently, but we would also reduce taxes for families so that those choices would be real and viable.

• (1150)

I could go on and on but I choose not to because I know we are eager to hear what my colleague has to say in terms of the health care system. He will talk more about that part of it.

I simply want to conclude by emphasizing that what the Liberals say and what they do are two different stories. The ads on television this week and what is actually happening is not the same story. One is designed to win the next election. What they are actually doing, by their policies and actual practices, is putting health care at serious risk in this country. It is time to replace these Liberals and put into power a government that thinks clearly about these things, communicates clearly with the Canadian people and will fix the problem.

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Elk Island and the House for allowing me to speak on an issue that is very close to all our hearts.

Bill C-45 is five years too late. Everybody in the House knows and understands the problems we have, not only in our health care system but in our education system and in the welfare programs that we have today.

We have a situation today in health care where there is an increasing disparity between the resources that we have to pay for and what we ask for. As time passes, as we get older, as our demographics change and as the demands on our health care system increase, that gap between what we have to pay for and what we demand of our health care system will increase and widen. The result will be extraordinary pain and suffering for Canadians from coast to coast.

While we support the addition of \$5.5 billion into the system, as my colleague from Elk Island so eloquently stated, this is but a drop in the bucket. This will do nothing and it is little more than an election ploy.

Sadly, the bill should have been put forth five years ago because it will only get us back to 1995 levels. The public may not know or understand this, but when the funding actually comes in it will only get into the sharp edge of health care one and a half years from now. What will happen to all the patients who sit and suffer in quiet pain and suffering at home? People are suffering and waiting for timely access to health care, the timely access that the Minister of Health likes to stand up and crow about. He says that all Canadians must have timely access to essential health care services and that the government is doing that. That is bunk. That is absolutely untrue.

Let us talk about the truth. Let us talk about what is going on in health care in Canada today. For more than five years the government has removed funding for health care on the one hand, while on the other hand, it has restricted the provinces from giving their patients, the sick people in their provinces, the chance to get the care they require. The provinces have been hamstrung. Their hands have been tied behind their backs and they have been unable to be innovative because of the federal government.

It is disingenuous of the government to say on the one hand that it will uphold a system. We all want to ensure timely access to essential health care services in a public system for all Canadians. Canadians should not have to pay out of their own pockets for health care or be refused health care as a result of having no money in their pockets. No one in the House wants that, least of all us, but for heaven's sake we should not use politics and try to stand up and be the great white knight defending people's health care when in reality we are actually restricting the ability of people to get health care when they need it.

All of us here have a common interest in ensuring that our public health care system is strengthened. However, since the Liberal

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government came to power it has been restricting the provinces' ability to do this.

A lot of the words in the bill are good. The bill talks about collaboration, about commitment and about the desire to have a publicly funded, sustainable health care system where people have timely access to health care services. However, they have been talking about that for seven years. The reality can best be illustrated by the story of Mrs. Marilyn Slater, who lives on Vancouver Island. She is a 64 year old who recently had her hip replaced.

• (1155)

Mrs. Slater was paralyzed with pain because of her hip and desperately needed an operation. About two years ago she went to see her physician. He told her that she would get a hip replacement within two years. She waited in pain for two years to get her hip replaced. This was the health care system that was supposed to give her timely access to essential health care services. Was it timely? No. Was it essential? Yes. Did she suffer? Yes. Is this what the Canada Health Act or the government is supposed to uphold? No.

It is completely unfair to allow people like Marilyn Slater and so many others across this country to suffer.

In the hospital where I sometimes work, a situation has occurred over the last year. People are on waiting lists for a little over two years before they can get in to see an orthopedic surgeon. Because of a lack of money, the hospital told the orthopedic surgeons, knowing they were working only one day a week in the operating room, that, although the hospital was sorry, it would have to cut the operating room time to a half day a week. This pushed the waiting lists for a patient to be seen in this community, which serves half of British Columbia, to three and a half years. A three and a half year wait to see an orthopedic surgeon for patients in severe pain has nothing to do with health care and everything to do with being inhumane. It is torture.

There are ways of dealing with this, but for heaven's sake, putting forward a bill that will put money into the sharp edge of health care, some of it a year and a half from now, and ultimately put us back to where we should have been five years ago, is not good health care.

When the bill goes through and the money goes to the health care system, we will still have people suffering, like Marilyn Slater and the people in northern British Columbia. This is happening all over the country. Barrie and Peterborough hospitals routinely close down their emergency departments because the hallways are filled with people on gurneys and they cannot fit any more in. Why are those people there? They are there because they cannot get a bed in a hospital. The hospitals are saying that they do not have enough money to pay for nurses and open up beds. That is not good health care and it is happening across the country.

If anybody says that we have timely access to health care, I would like to know where, because it does not happen too often. It happens to people who are acutely injured, to be sure. It is only because of the bravery and courage of our medical health care workers in the field that they are able to do this.

We need solutions. We have a manpower crisis. The government gives vague concepts of how to relieve this but where are the specifics? The specifics need to be talked about now because in the next 10 years we will have a lack of 112,000 nurses in Canada. The average age of the physician population right now is about 45 to 46. There is a crisis today in virtually every medical specialty, whether it is in neuropathology, neurosurgery or general surgery. The list goes on. We need an effective plan.

I want to propose one plan to the government, speaking personally. The government should work with the provinces to allow an expansion of the number of people not only in medical schools but in nursing colleges and technology schools. Let us not forget the medical technologists who are an integral part of our health care team. Many of them are working one and a half jobs just to fill in for the lack of personnel.

One option may be for the government to pay 10% to 15% toward a student's tuition fees and in return the student would serve an equal number of years in an underserved area. That would relieve the maldistribution problem that we have. We know that if a medical worker goes into an urban setting during a period of time it is very difficult to attract them to an underserved area; in fact it rarely happens. What we have to do is catch them when they get out of school.

• (1200)

Speaking personally, this plan would allow people to have their tuition fees paid for the amount of time they are in school. In return they would provide an equal number of years in a rural, underserved area. That is what is done in military training. It can be done in health care. If that is done it will provide some access to people who are desperately in need of care in rural settings.

Another aspect I want to talk about is education. The situation now is that post-secondary education has been completely gutted for a number of years. Students are having a very difficult time making ends meet and have had an onerous burden placed upon them.

Certainly it is true they have to pay for their tuition, but what is happening now is very interesting and actually violates a sense of egalitarianism the government likes to profess to have. Money has become a significant factor in preventing people from gaining access to professional schools. In the faculty of medicine at the University of Toronto it costs about \$10,000 a year to become a doctor. I could not have become a physician if those had been the fees when I was going through.

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That is a major restriction now to people of low to middle class means. They cannot afford to send their children to professional faculties any more. Now those faculties are becoming the purview of the children of the rich. That is not right. No one in the House would like to see that happen.

As our party and our former leader have in the past, let us talk about an income contingent loan replacement scheme. Our scheme would enable students to put back the money they have taken out in loans. Those moneys would be put back in a way that is fair to them and fair to taxpayers. We have encouraged and have tried to put the government on notice in this regard for a number of years. We have indicated that these students have suffered. Some of them had to end their studies because they could not afford them. The plan our party has put forth would enable them to study and it would be fair to taxpayers.

On the issue of children, my colleague from Elk Island spoke very eloquently about the need for strengthening the parent-child bond. We cannot have an inequitable tax regime such as we have today, which does not enable parents to spend more quality time with their children. This has to change.

For years we have been asking the government to ensure that there is tax fairness between parents who choose to go to work and parents who stay home. It is not difficult. It could be changed simply. Let us change it. We need to do that. The tax system of today also restricts the ability of many parents to stay at home. As a result parents are forced into the workplace.

We also need to consider, if we are to engage in a childhood development scheme, something that will work well. The Minister of Labour has been a leader, as has the minister responsible for children, on how we can ensure the basic needs of kids are met. As the Minister of Labour knows through her program in Moncton, strengthening the parent-child bond very early on will have an enormous, profound, positive effect on the development of a child into adolescence and into adulthood.

In fact someone won the Nobel prize for showing that the developing brain in a child is like a sponge. If we subject a child to sexual abuse, violence, improper nutrition, a lack of proper parenting or a lack of discipline, we find the child's brain does not develop properly and his or her cognitive abilities and emotional strength built early in life do not necessarily happen. We need to look at the body of evidence that actually works and to work with parents to ensure that takes place. It has to start early on.

BC Report contained a very good front page article, in the last two weeks, on the issue of fetal alcohol syndrome, the leading cause of preventable brain damage in the country today. Almost half of all people in jail today have fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol effects. It is an entirely preventable problem. It is devastat-

ing problem for children. Their cognitive abilities are destroyed. Their average IQ is 68. They have difficulty with interpersonal relations. Unfortunately many of them, as we have found, go into lives of crime. It is preventable. In order to prevent it we have to start before, in the prenatal phase. An effective head start program that strengthens the ability of parents to be good parents would work to prevent that.

• (1205)

Let us imagine if we were able to do that not only from a humanitarian basis but from a total cost basis. One of those children costs the system almost a half million dollars a year up to age 18, and it is preventable. Let us imagine the savings if a child does not go to jail, which costs \$100,000 a year in a juvenile institution. As someone who has worked in jails for a number of years, it is terrible to see. It is a waste. It is a waste for the taxpayer. It is a waste for the human being. It is a waste for society.

I could only encourage the government to follow along with the lead of my colleague, to work with what it knows is effective to strengthen the parent-child bond and to look at the tax regime. If something is to be implemented, it should not be a national day care centre but a program that strengthens the parent-child bond so that the parents can be better parents to their children. We know that is the most effective way. Also we must ensure that children get proper nutrition and that parents have the means to do that.

On the welfare system, another aspect of CHST, we know there are two populations on welfare: those people who will never be able to take care of themselves, but thankfully we have a system that allows us to do that, and another population that would like to work but for reasons cannot.

One of the biggest complaints we receive from people on welfare is that they do not want a handout. They want a hand up. What really aggravates them is that they want to get some skills, some training, and they need a bit of help to enable them to do that. However what they find is that they are penalized when they try. They are penalized when they say they want to work a bit, to get back into the workforce and to develop the skills that will enable them to provide for their families.

In the way the current welfare system is structured it rewards people for staying at home and not working. It actively penalizes individuals who are trying to get the necessary skills to stand on their own two feet.

I know that is not the objective of anyone in the House, but we have not seen leadership on the part of the government to work with the provinces, because it is a provincially managed program, to reform our welfare system so that we can give people who want to work the tools and the skills to enable them to stand on their own two feet. They would be so grateful for that, that votes, money and

accolades would go to whomever does it. That is what we need. We need leadership in these areas and we need reform of the system.

The Minister of Health said on November 27, 1999, and this can be ascribed to education and to welfare, that medicare would soon be unable to provide Canadians with timely access to medical care unless major reforms are undertaken.

I have not seen, and I do not know if anybody else has seen them, those major reforms coming down the pipeline. We certainly see nice words in the bill. There is a commitment to some funds that will put it back to 1995 levels, but we do not see the major structured reforms of leadership that will be required on the part of the government to make those reforms relevant and effective for the 21st century, be it health care, be it welfare, be it education.

There rests on the shoulders of the government an extraordinary opportunity in leadership. Why does it not call the first ministers together again? They should be locked in a room along with the relevant ministers and told that the problem has to be fixed. At the end of the day they all have the same interests. We need to have the interests of the public at heart. They should put away the nonsense, the political drivel, and sit down to fix the problem, given effective solutions that already exist in the country today. They exist. Good solutions from not only our country but from around the world exist.

We could look at the German model for health care. We could take the best from Moncton, Michigan and Hawaii for children. We could look at welfare programs in other parts of the world that give people a handout to give them a hand up.

• (1210)

We could look at manpower solutions that would address a problem that if not dealt with today would result in the deaths of many Canadians tomorrow. It is not something that we could deal with tomorrow, because this problem affects us today. It takes four to twelve years to train the people we need after high school.

I could only beg on the part of myself and my colleagues that the government takes Bill C-45 and implements it but gets back to the drawing board now to help people who are suffering in quiet desperation and enduring years of pain unnecessarily. Let us get together and do that. Let us implement the solution. Let us not wait five years to make any changes. Let us do it this year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonnette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues here for unfailingly supporting my actions.

First off, I want to say that we are extremely happy with the agreement negotiated after a hard fought battle with the provinces.

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I will have an opportunity to mention it again, but I want to say to this House that, at a later stage of our work, either in committee or here in committee of the whole, if that is how our work is to be done, I will table two amendments, which I will explain in the course of the debate.

My first amendment concerns the section of the bill dealing with the acquisition of medical equipment for which a trust will be set up with an injection of \$1 billion in resources. It was agreed in fairly detailed terms that the use of this amount for the provinces would be broken down. We would like to introduce an amendment that would clarify this even further by setting out in clause 2 how the amounts of money will be distributed.

In the 40 minutes allotted me, I will explain it in greater detail, but we will be introducing an amendment to clause 3 as well, on funding for communications technologies. This refers to the part of the agreement concerning the pooling of data relating to health care, the whole health information network the premiers have agreed to set up.

The Bloc Québécois finds something particularly revealing in the agreement before us. Members will recall that at the first of the Minister of Finance's budgets containing cuts to the transfer payments the Bloc registered its objection. It warned the government against—one of the means available to the government—making this federalism dysfunctional. Furthermore, as of 1994, we felt the federal government might destabilize the provinces' public funds.

Today, although a draft agreement provides some relief by injecting \$23 billion over five years into transfer payments, we cannot forget that between 1994 and the Minister of Finance's latest budget the provinces have been deprived of a total of \$42 billion.

On the subject of Canadian federalism, when they say it is a system with two levels of government, that each is supposed to be autonomous, as constitutional law teaches—

Mr. Daniel Turp: Indeed.

Mr. Réal Ménard: My colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry has even taught this to his students. It is hard to imagine in a federal system worthy of being called one that a government can literally strangle the provinces with its policy, and this is what has happened.

It is in fact so true—and I want to make this point in my preliminary remarks, because I want to spend time on the essential issue of health—that in 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1996, governments, especially that of Quebec, witnessed a sort of transfer of clientele. In other words, all the cuts to health care or to employment insurance have had the effect of preventing people from qualifying

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for programs they had access to previously. They ended up turning to the program of income security in increasing numbers.

• (1215)

This is so true that some authors, such as economist Pierre Fortin, have estimated that the restrictions arising from the various federal government cuts have cost the Quebec public treasury additional millions. Clearly the agreement before us provides reparation. We must not ever forget that.

It is no small matter, when we consider the years 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 and up to today. What was needed was a common stand by all the premiers, be they New Democrat, Conservative or Liberal. Brian Tobin has, in recent years, added a strong voice to this debate. He called upon the federal government to re-establish the transfer payments.

I repeat, we are going to subscribe to the agreement we have before us. We are going to make amendments, but we want the money to be made available to the provinces as promptly as possible. We are dealing with the outcome of a mess that was literally provoked by the federal government.

This is an example of why we on this side of the House are sovereignists. It makes no sense for there to be two orders of government, one of them with more financial means than the other, because of its taxation powers and the division of powers.

Here is where the question lies: In modern life, as we are living it in this month of October in the year 2000, the major responsibilities our citizens expect us to meet fall under the jurisdiction of the provincial governments. Whether it be health or education, these are areas of responsibility that are at the core of our fellow citizens' lives, and ones on which the federal government has virtually no say, despite the fact that it is better off financially, with more financial resources than the provincial governments.

Nevertheless, without this common front, without the doggedness of the Bloc Québécois which has made this a guideline, a baseline, a kind of leitmotif for all of its political action since the Minister of Finance's budget, without this concerted effort by the various actors putting pressure on the federal government, I do not believe that this would have been accomplished.

In my opinion, another explanatory factor for the agreement reached by the first ministers at the September 11 conference, in addition to all the ones that have come out of Winnipeg via Ottawa, is the imminence of a federal election.

The Prime Minister, cabinet and the whole government caucus knew full well that it would have been unthinkable to call an election after impoverishing the provinces, after exerting very real

pressure on the health system, without doing something to restore the sharing of fiscal responsibilities.

To make things clear, let us take a look at what this agreement provides. The agreement is based on six major points. First, it seeks, as I said, to restore transfer payments. A total of \$23.4 billion will be invested over the next 5 years. Next year it will be \$18 billion, then \$19 billion, \$20 billion and \$21 billion. Transfer payments will be increased to \$21 billion and about \$2 billion will be kept for policies directly aimed at young children.

In addition to that, a \$1 billion trust will be set up for the acquisition of medical equipment. It is critical to realize how important this is for the health system, because medical technologies change very rapidly.

Last winter, I met the administrators of the various hospitals on the island of Montreal. I wanted to know how things were done, what their major management challenges were and what it meant, ultimately, for an administrator to provide health services to a community.

• (1220)

All the administrators told me about the importance of renewing the technological equipment in the medical sector. Acquisition costs for these technologies are extremely high and the life expectancy of this equipment is about five, six or seven years at best. So \$1 billion will be earmarked for the acquisition of medical equipment.

The bill is too vague and an amendment will be necessary, because we want to correct that flaw. We want it to be clearly stipulated that the proposed funding, the \$1 billion for the acquisition of medical technologies, will be entirely consistent and in no way discretionary with what was agreed at the meeting of first ministers in Ottawa.

I draw the attention of all parliamentarians to the fact that the final press release for the Ottawa conference gives the breakdown of this \$1 billion for 2001-02. The totals are given for each province. For 2000-01, Quebec will be receiving \$119.9 million; the amount for the following year will be \$119.2 million. We must not find ourselves in a situation where we pass a bill that is not very clear about what the first ministers agreed to.

This is an extremely important part of the agreement. We attach very great importance to it and that is why we will be tabling an amendment here in the House if we go into committee of the whole for the subsequent stages.

In addition to the \$1 billion fund for the acquisition of medical equipment, the purchase and installation of modern diagnostic tools and other medical equipment that is obviously urgently

needed, there is a \$500 million fund for the installation of health information technologies.

This is also an important feature of the agreement. We know that each of the provinces has a database and computer networks, information that may give a clearer picture not just of the progression of diseases, but of various trends in the medical community.

At the Ottawa conference this past September 11, the first ministers agreed to exchange this information. The purpose of the information exchange is to ensure compatibility among the various information systems so that data may be exchanged at high speed without any technological hitches.

This was made very clear in the communiqué. There was no reference to Canada-wide information standards, as there is in the bill. In order to make things very clear for those who are listening to us, and in order for them to clearly understand the reason for our amendment, I would like to read what the first ministers had agreed to in their final communiqué at the end of the September 11 conference.

Specifically in relation to health information and communication technology, both Premier Bouchard and Minister Marois agreed that it is important to have this exchange of information, and to have it work both ways, so that the provinces may also benefit. For example, the federal government has a health information network. It is important that this information circulate as freely as possible.

We know that every time the government of Mr. Bouchard, and of Mr. Parizeau before him, had the opportunity to serve the superior interests of Quebec, it made a contribution.

As an aside, I would remind hon. members that any time there was an opportunity to allow Quebecers to benefit from a change for the better in the status quo as far as their day-to-day services were concerned, the sovereignist governments, which are as everyone knows extremely vigilant in defending the interests of Quebec, whether in the time of René Lévesque, Jacques Parizeau or Lucien Bouchard, have taken advantage of that opportunity.

• (1225)

I want to remind members that the manpower agreement was negotiated by Louise Harel. It was not accomplished under the Bourassa government. It was vitally important to have a single window in Quebec in 1995 for those receiving income security and those receiving employment insurance. Quebec had had enough of making a distinction in connection with changes in the labour market that for too long had resulted in a duplication of programs that left the public confused. The result is that as we speak, someone who is unemployed in Quebec can access all of the Government of Quebec programs through a single window and does not need to go through a multitude of intermediaries.

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The sovereignist governments, because their allegiance is to Quebec alone and to the people they represent, have, in very current matters that are at the heart of our fellow citizens' concerns, been able to come up with agreements where the federalist governments could not.

I have just given the example of manpower, but I could have given other examples. I would, however, like to get back to the matter of health. On the subject of health information and communication technology, it was agreed at article 7 of the agreement, which I quote, that:

All governments have made major investments in health information technologies in recent years to improve care and health system management.

First Ministers agree to work together to strengthen a Canada-wide health infrastructure to improve quality, access and timeliness of health care for Canadians. First Ministers also commit to develop electronic health records and to enhance technologies like telehealth—

Telehealth is remote health care. I will give you as an example the case of a person who is x-rayed in Lotbinière riding but needs further treatment in the Saint-Luc hospital. It is then possible with telehealth to send the x-ray and the information by means of an electronic and computerized process.

Telehealth will become extremely important in the coming years, because we know that the treatment individuals are to receive may not be available in their community. I will continue reading from article 7:

—over the next few years.

Here I draw the attention of the members, because this is where we will introduce an amendment.

Governments will continue to work collaboratively to develop common data standards to ensure compatibility of health information networks. This will lead to more integrated delivery of health care services. They will also ensure the stringent protection of privacy, confidentiality and security of personal health information.

It goes without saying that this information must be secure.

There are several causes for concern in the bill. I repeat, Premier Bouchard and the health minister, Pauline Marois, have agreed that in order to follow developments and understand events in areas relating to health care it is important to have information circulate. That is understandable.

I will give you an example. The Quebec public drug plan covers certain drugs. We want to know if the equivalent of the drugs covered by this public program exists in other provinces. How much does AZT or a new medication for hypertension cost in Quebec, and what is its equivalent in other provinces? It would be helpful to provide this kind of information through a network, and that information should be accessible to all the stakeholders, but there is absolutely nothing on national health standards.

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• (1230)

This morning, the leader of the Bloc Québécois, the deputy leader of the government and yours truly were very surprised—let us not forget that we received the bill late yesterday afternoon—to see that the legal wording of clause 3 reads as follows:

3. The Minister of Finance may make a direct payment of \$500 million for the fiscal year beginning on April 1, 2000 to a corporation, to be named by order of the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Minister of Health, for the purpose of developing and supporting the adoption of Canada-wide information standards and compatible communications technologies for health services in Canada.

As members can see, there is a difference between the text of the final release approved at the first ministers' conference on September 11 and the legal wording.

Perhaps the different wordings in the release and in the bill are an accident because the legal officers did not accurately reflect the will of the premiers and of the Prime Minister. That is possible, but the Bloc Québécois will have to propose amendments, and I understand that the government will support such amendments. This will ensure an adequate process for everyone, and I gather that there will be no obstruction from any side.

These are the main points of the agreement. I wanted to go over it again because I think it is vital to our understanding. Had it not been for the vigilance of the Bloc Québécois, the common front presented by all the first ministers and, I think we would have to agree, the impending election, we would never have arrived at an agreement such as this.

I also wish to take this opportunity to remind the House that one year ago all the health ministers had asked their officials to try to determine the progression of health care costs. We cannot say this often enough. It would have been unbelievable, completely shameful of the federal government, and it would have shown a complete lack of civility and political good grace if the federal government had not made this gesture of atonement. This is the atonement of a hegemonic government that has repeatedly taken advantage of its financial position, that has acted unilaterally to make the provinces poorer, often creating additional costs for their respective treasuries.

All this was documented in a study, which I have summarized, because it is 200 pages long. This was a study commissioned by all health ministers. First, it looked at a well-known demand. At the time, all the provinces were calling on the federal government to restore transfer payments to 1994 levels immediately. This is pretty much what is being proposed. In this, the provinces have been successful.

It is worthwhile calling to mind that the study in question indicated that total provincial and territorial health expenditures

were \$11 billion in 1977. Why did they choose 1977? Because, hon. members will recall, that was the first year the existing programs were reformulated and the first year reference was made to established programs financing, the famous EPF.

Let us recall that in 1977 the provinces were spending \$11 billion on health, whereas this year they will be spending \$56 billion. This gives us an idea of the effort the provinces have had to expend in order to continue to provide health services to their respective populations. In parallel with the stepped up efforts of the province, the federal government has disengaged.

When I am asked to speak to people working in the health sector or at conferences, I always remind my listeners that for the year 2001-02 for example, if the government of Quebec wanted to provide exactly the same services as this year's to its population without adding any new services, its health budget would have to go up 5%. Thus, the health budget of the government of Quebec is rising more rapidly than the collective wealth being generated by the people of Quebec.

• (1235)

This is the dramatic situation that is going on. Once again, if the federal government had not re-established the transfer payments, it would have been extremely difficult for the government of Quebec to manage without jeopardizing other equally essential missions in the Quebec community. I think I have explained this sufficiently, so I will go on to the conclusion of the report.

I thank the hon. member for Québec for being here with me in the House. I do not think I have ever made a significant speech without her support. As far as politics is concerned, we are just about joined at the hip.

The main thrust of the conclusion of the report by all the ministers of health is extremely interesting. Let me read that conclusion. It says:

A review of the block funding for health shows that the gap between the current amount of the federal contribution, and the amount at which that contribution could be if it had increased significantly, has constantly grown bigger.

There is a big difference between the health care system of the eighties and that of the year 2000-01. For one thing, new diseases have surfaced. For example, AIDS was unknown before the eighties. Still, we won the battle against AIDS which, during the eighties and the early nineties, was a deadly disease. It is now a chronic disease, because we can control it with triple therapy.

The most important factor is, of course, the aging population. The Quebec population ages faster than the population in other countries. I have some figures here. Mr. Speaker, knowing your intellectual curiosity, I will be pleased to share these figures with you.

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In 35 years, one quarter of Quebec's population will be over 55 years of age. In Germany or in France, it will take 65 years for that same phenomenon to occur, but in Quebec it will only take 35 years. Imagine the pressure that this puts on the public health system, but also the challenge that we will have to face when restructuring our health services.

Our generation is not the same as the generation of our parents or grandparents. People will not necessarily accept to live outside their homes when they get old. They will want to stay longer and longer, as long as possible, I would say, in their natural community.

This is one item of the budget that will be increasing, I am happy to tell the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, because he is our oldest member, although he is still very alert. He may even be the oldest member of the House. No, I think that distinction is reserved for the member for Terrebonne—Blainville. In any event, the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel is the Bloc Québécois critic for seniors' issues. We know that one of the budget items that will be growing in both absolute and relative terms is home care.

Governments are going to have to devote considerable effort to keeping people in their home setting. This means that the focus of service will have to shift from institutions to the community. This is called primary care. This is why the agreement provides for \$800 million over five years to study how to keep people in their home setting as long as possible.

I was asked to speak for 30 minutes and I think I have done that. I will sum up with three points.

• (1240)

The Bloc Québécois is delighted that the federal government has finally loosened the purse strings and is about to invest \$23.4 billion over the next five years. We will of course make sure that Quebec gets its fair share.

On examining the bill, we noticed discrepancies between what the first ministers wanted and the wording of the bill. The Bloc Québécois is going to move an amendment to clause 2 in order to ensure that the established population-based shares do indeed go to the provinces as agreed.

As for the compatibility of the various information networks and databases, which everyone agrees is important for a comprehensive overview, we will ensure that we do go the way of national standards, because this is not necessary and because it was not what the first ministers agreed to.

In conclusion, I assure the House of our desire to help see that the bill is passed quickly. I understand that in any event the government is going to agree to the amendments moved by the Bloc Québécois.

[English]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, needless to say we welcome the opportunity to finally debate in a meaningful way the health care crisis in Canada today.

It is interesting to note that this is the first time in the last three years and four months since we were elected to this place in June 1997 that we have before us a bill from the government pertaining to the number one issue of Canadians. For three years and four months we have known full well that the country and its health care system is going deeper and deeper into crisis, but it has taken three years and four months for the government to finally bring the matter to the House and to allow for a thorough debate on this very critical issue.

The bill, whatever it is called, whatever number it has and whichever minister presents it, is clearly the government's supposed solution to its mismanagement of the health care situation in Canada today. Let us be under no illusions about what the bill is. It is the result of pressure, pushing, cajoling and prodding from Canadians everywhere in the country. It is a reluctant step in response to that outcry, that outpouring of concern.

Obviously we in the New Democratic Party welcome this opportunity. We have been raising the issue tirelessly in the House for the last number of years.

Members in the New Democratic Party caucus feel a tremendous responsibility to ensure that the work of our forefathers and foremothers in the CCF and the NDP in pioneering medicare is carried on. The House will appreciate that we feel the pioneering work, that innovative contribution to Canadian public policy, has in fact been jeopardized by the inaction, passivity and lack of leadership by the federal Liberal government.

There is clearly a need for the House to debate the health care issue. There is clearly a need for the House to ensure adequate and thorough review of the bill before us. I hope we have that opportunity. One gets the impression that the government is in fact attempting to push the bill through in short order. One can imagine our concern after reading news reports today quoting the Minister of Health's suggestion that the House would deal with the bill in one day.

• (1245)

Imagine our shock and concern when we read, as is mentioned in the Charlottetown *Guardian*, that the Minister of Health suggested at the federal-provincial health ministers meeting that the provinces bend the ear of opposition members of parliament if they want to ensure the bill passes before a possible fall election. I hope this is not accurate. I hope that members in the government are not

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trying to manipulate parliament or trying to use this place as a rubber stamp.

Before this parliament is one of the most important issues in the history of this country and the government wants to shove it through. It wants to cut off debate. It wants to deny the opportunity for thoughtful analysis, scrutiny and reflection. As some of my colleagues in the House have said, is this just another cynical election ploy to create the illusion, the false pretence to the Canadian public that the government is actually doing something on health care after neglecting this field and doing nothing for seven years? Surely not.

Surely this place is not about satisfying a particular party's agenda to advance its election timetable. Surely this place is not about satisfying the political agenda of one party.

We must ensure that we have some opportunity to debate this very important issue. We hope we will have that opportunity. We will certainly do our part to thoroughly review the bill and to offer our careful analysis.

Let us not forget, and let us be mindful of the fact that the bill was delivered to us yesterday at 3 p.m. Let us not forget or ignore the fact that this is a substantial piece of legislation. Let us not forget that we have a responsibility to ensure that this opportunity in the history of Canada is not forsaken for the whim of a political electoral agenda.

It is interesting that the House has never had a debate initiated by the government on the state of health care in the entire last three years and four months. We have also never had the opportunity to discuss this matter in the Standing Committee on Health, the parliamentary committee that is supposed to be the body, the avenue, for thorough review and study of the issues of the day.

Health care is the number one issue of the day. The health care system is in crisis. The government is clearly under pressure to listen to the voices of Canadians and we have not even had the opportunity to discuss this matter in the health committee. It has not been for lack of trying. In fact we have had motions before the health committee to convince the Liberal members on that committee that the committee should be reviewing the state of health care and should be providing important input and advice to the government. Of course the trained seals across the way rallied around the Minister of Health, who gives the directions. They cut off debate and denied the opportunity and assured us we would never have an opportunity as parliamentarians to thoroughly discuss this issue.

Here we are with our backs against the wall, I guess the Liberals would probably say. Here we are being told we have a limited opportunity to discuss the number one issue facing Canadians. I say shame on the Liberals. Shame on the government for not allowing

this place, this democratic institution that speaks on behalf of all Canadians, to have a say in the future of health care in this country.

• (1250)

If we thought we were being manipulated by what we are hearing in the media and what the ministers are purported to have said at the health ministers meeting, it certainly has been confirmed by the full coverage of the government's advertising campaign. As we speak, \$8 million of ads are happening to espouse the virtues of the deal and presumably of the legislation before us.

How is it that we are supposed to be offering a thorough analysis and ensuring proper parliamentary procedure around Bill C-45 when ads are already running saying it is a done deal? The ads are already saying it is over. Are we nothing but a rubber stamp? Is that all we are today? Let us hope not and let us hope we have a bit of time to discuss these issues.

While we are talking about the whole process and the clear sense we have that the government wants to push this bill through, let us look at the fact that the health committee has yet to reconvene. The health committee has yet to meet, elect a chair and plan an agenda. That says it all about how much the government cares about the democratic process and parliamentary procedures and respect for the institution. It has bypassed, ignored and violated every process available to parliamentarians. It has denied us the opportunity to speak on behalf of Canadians who care deeply about the issue.

What is the rush? Why is the government rushing the bill through if that is the case? Clearly the bill implements the September 11 deal of the first ministers. That deal causes grave concern to all of us and does not even ensure that the increased transfer payments kick in until 2001. After reading this bill it will be clear that the Liberals want to rush through a bill that is not really meant to be operational until the spring of 2001.

Obviously we wonder, what is the rush. The Liberals may argue that they need the bill to implement the special funds that first ministers agreed to pertaining to equipment, information technology and transition funds. If that is the case, then surely they would agree to split the bill. Give us an option to deal with what is urgent and pressing and allow for a much more thorough and comprehensive debate in terms of the whole issue of transfer payments and the future of medicare.

One also has to wonder, if it is so important to rush this bill through to make those special funds operational, why is it that only the funds pertaining to equipment and to information technology are mentioned in the bill? If, as the minister of revenue said earlier, the idea of transition funds to reform our primary health care system is so important, why is that not mentioned in the bill? Does the government have other ways to do that? If so, why is that other means not used to deploy the funds for the equipment and

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information technology parts of the agreement? It just does not make sense, unless this is simply a cynical ploy to present a facade, an illusion, to the people in an election soon to be called.

Let us not forget there have been seven years of neglect. Let us not forget that the government is now trying to compensate for incompetence, mismanagement, neglect and lack of leadership over the last seven years. Let us not forget that it was in 1995 that the bunch across the way took the biggest single bite out of health care funding in the history of the country.

Let us not forget that the government had an opportunity to act on a blueprint presented to parliament, the government and the Canadian people from the national forum on health. It suggested exactly what needed to be done for the future of medicare and the government sat on it and let it gather dust.

Let us not forget that in 1997 the government in its most cynical move ever, but maybe not as cynical as the one we are about to see, decided to campaign on the ideas of national pharmacare and home care. Three years and four months have passed since that time and not a step has been taken to move toward the implementation of those ideas. We have nothing but broken promises and empty rhetoric when it comes to the most fundamental issues of health care today.

• (1255)

Let us not forget that the government had an opportunity in the last budget to do what Canadians said it should do, to do what every provincial and territorial government said it should do, to do what every health care organization in the country said it should do. That was to increase financing and transfer payments for health care in a way that was significant, sufficient and predictable to meet the growing needs and demands on our system.

What did the government do? I am sure it knew it had a pretty significant surplus back then, given the projections we are hearing today of \$33 billion for the present fiscal year. The government probably knew it had a pretty good surplus back in February 2000. What did it choose to do? It gave two cents for health care for every dollar in tax cuts. That was it, the two cents for health care budget.

We spent six months clamouring, pushing, prodding and cajoling the government to do something. We asked that it address the needs and the crisis in the health care system. We asked that it ensure that at this time of opportunity funds be put into health care at least to get us back in line with a 25% federal share of health care financing and ideally a 50:50 partnership.

Here we are today and finally it has chosen to act, to take a small step, a tiny step. With the September 11 deal, as outlined in this legislation, the government has put back most of the funds that it itself cut out of health care in 1995, but not quite. It is not even the full amount. We are still about \$900 million short, if I am not mistaken. It still will not kick in until next year. There is still no long term predictability and sustainability in the system. Of course,

we have to keep in mind that it has a limited timeframe. There is a five year period and nothing beyond that.

Even on the issue of money, which is only part of the picture and part of the work required, the government did a half job. It took a partial step. It could not even complete the task at hand when it came to the transfer payments it slashed back in its first term of office in 1995.

Let us not be under any illusions that this is a historic deal. Let us not try to paint this for something it is not. My goodness, the Canadian people are smarter than that. They know what this deal is all about. They are prepared, as we are, to acknowledge it is a small step, but it certainly is not a plan and a vision for the future.

My goodness, no wonder Canadians are asking if there really is any difference between the Liberals and the Alliance. Are the Liberals not just doing what the Alliance is saying? The Alliance leader has said that national standards are not needed. Obviously we totally disagree with that approach but the Liberals, who had an opportunity to move on national standards, let it drop off the agenda.

The Alliance has said that we do not need to have any enforcement of the Canada Health Act by way of financial penalties. The Liberals let it happen. They just do not enforce the Canada Health Act. They had an opportunity with bill 11 to do something, but they stood back and let that bill on private for profit hospitals make its way through the legislative route. Today we are facing this black moment in our history, this dark period in our time, where bill 11, the first bill in the country for private for profit hospitals, has become law.

The government had a golden opportunity not just to stabilize the system, but to move forward. I dare say it had the will and the support of many around the table at the first ministers' meeting on September 11, but it chose to go with the bare minimal approach. It chose to do the least possible. It chose risk management over dreaming big dreams and planning for the future.

What is missing in this deal is a plan for the future. Despite what the Prime Minister has tried to suggest in the House and despite what other members are saying today, there is nothing in this deal to advance the country toward a national pharmacare and home care plan. There is nothing.

• (1300)

Alliance members are clapping about that. Alliance members obviously do not support any kind of strengthening of the medicare system. The Alliance has actively advocated private, for profit health care. We do not expect much support from members on that side of the House for our position today, but we hold out a tiny bit of hope that maybe somehow we can get through to the government today to tell it clearly not to miss the opportunity to go back to the

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drawing board and come up with a plan that can be implemented now to renew and strengthen medicare.

We are at a crossroads. We said that last spring. We can go forward in terms of building a universal public health care system, or we can let it lapse into a two tier American style health care system. We are still at that crossroads today despite the bill. We are still here because of the lack of courage, the lack of dreaming, the lack of vision, the lack of decision making and the lack of leadership from the government.

I conclude my remarks by saying let us have a chance to debate this issue, to talk about the future and build a strong medicare system. Our fight, from our point of view, is far from over. It is clear to us that we cannot fix health care without a plan to control drug prices, without a national home care plan and without the courage to fight privatization.

We will keep speaking out in parliament and everywhere across the land so that we can continue to take steps toward restoring and renewing medicare. We will be even louder in our demands, in pushing for a national plan and a national vision, because the very future of medicare is at stake.

Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay—Boundary—Okanagan, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, what takes place in the House from time to time is very unfortunate. Different parties, the opposition, and even, heaven forbid, sometimes people on the government side, actually come up with some good ideas. Unfortunately they couch them among much rhetoric and dogma. We lose the good part of what these members have to say when there is so much nonsense tied in with it.

I would like to question the member who just spoke about a specific aspect that was raised in my riding by an NDP cabinet minister who is running for the Liberal Party nomination. It is an interesting situation. He raised the matter of Alberta's bill 11, which is legislation that authorizes the provincial government to contract with the private sector to provide services that the government is not able to provide in a timely manner.

That is what the NDP is so adamantly opposed to, but in my province of British Columbia, which has an NDP government, exactly the same thing is done. The Workers' Compensation Board and the NDP provincial government contract with the private sector and hire doctors to queue jump, to bypass the system. Both the WCB and the NDP government frequently send patients to the United States health care system. The only difference is that it has not been legitimized through legislation. That government tries to pretend it is not doing that while in fact it has been doing that for far longer than Alberta has.

What is the hon. member opposed to in Alberta when her own provincial wing in British Columbia has been doing exactly the same thing?

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have this question because it is very important for the people of the country to know exactly where the political parties stand when it comes to something as fundamental as our universal public health care system.

I tell the member who expressed an opinion here today that he is wrong, that what Alberta is doing through bill 11 is endorsing and legitimizing private, for profit hospitals for the first time in the history of the country. We happen to believe that there is no room for profit in our health care system.

Obviously members of the Alliance Party have backing from private market forces and multinational corporations that want a piece of the pie. They see the health care system solely in terms of the potential for making money. They see it as an \$82 billion golden egg.

• (1305)

We do not. We happen to think that the only way to run our health care system is to continue on the path of non-profit public administration, ensuring universal access to everyone in the country regardless of the money they make and regardless of where they live.

We are obviously having to deal with an incredible barrage from the forces of darkness in the country who believe that the only way to save our health care system is to allow for a private parallel health care system. That does not work. It is not more effective. It does not save money. It does not deal with waiting lists.

For a party that talks all the time about the most effective and efficient way to go, why does it not support us in our efforts to ensure that the medicare model, which as we know is fundamentally sound, is allowed to take us into the millennium to be the basis upon which we build a system that is truly responsive to the needs of Canadians?

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. member for her passionate and informed remarks on this very timely and important matter.

We in this party very much embrace the same concept that much of what is wrong with health care now is more than just money. The money that has been proposed here is inadequate. The premier of her province, the premier of my province and others gathered with the Prime Minister with the genuine intent that they were looking for some indication the government was sincere in its approach and sincere in its intent to try to repair what is happening, to try to repair the undermining and the tearing of the fabric of health care.

What the Progressive Party of Canada and our leader have been proposing as one part of the remedy, not the be-all and end-all but

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one part, is to inject some stability and some long term commitment to the funding for health care.

We all know that the system is in need of nurses, doctors, equipment and beds, the fundamentals, but they also need to know there will be a plan that will allow them to plan for the future, that will allow them to address the ever increasing complexities and changing atmosphere in health care.

Does the hon. member also agree that this addition of a sixth principle to health care is what is needed as a starting point and that this is what should also have been included in this accord?

The hon. member referred to the current government as the forces of darkness. I would go one step further. The Prime Minister has become the Darth Vader of what has happened to health care. He is aided by the storm trooper Minister of Health and the faceless ewoks on the backbench who are ready to just let this happen. This is the quick fix: throwing a little money at it.

My colleague from New Brunswick Southwest has indicated that in the province of New Brunswick this influx of cash will result in nine days of funding. That is how quickly the money will be used up.

An hon. member: It is only six days.

Mr. Peter MacKay: That new influx of cash will last between six and nine days. That is an indication of what is really happening. This is very much money that is promised at some point in the future.

With the deathbed reprieve that has been offered by this accord, is it stability of funding? Is it a commitment that the money is to be there not only in the short term but in the long term? Is there also an agreement, a willingness and an openness on the part of the government to work with provincial health ministers to look at the big scheme? Is it a mechanism which will allow for fundamental approaches that will keep doctors, nurses and hospitals open and working together on a non-partisan level to ensure that health care will be there for Canadians in the future?

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. What is at stake here is how we build a system that is sustainable for the future. That is where I believe the government missed the boat. It missed a golden opportunity.

I believe there was a will among many of the provincial premiers around that table to look at a broader vision of health care. I know that from Manitoba there was a real desire for and an interest in having leadership from the government around a national pharmaceutical plan.

• (1310)

Instead of any kind of commitment to pursue a mechanism for advancing and renewing medicare, instead of sending a clear signal about where medicare has to go in the future, we got nothing but more task forces, working groups and studies on all the key issues.

On the critical human resource question and the crisis we are soon to face in terms of a nursing shortfall we got a committee. On the matter of drug prices skyrocketing out of reach we got a committee. On the question of home care we got a committee. On the questions of basic accountability and national standards, so-called report cards, and I hate to even use those words, we got a task force.

I hardly think that this was taking advantage of the opportunity. At a time when there seemed to be the will and spirit to move forward together, the government dropped the ball, backed away, did the bare minimum and refused to show any kind of leadership in bringing different forces together and going forward. Canadians will pay the price for that.

In very short order people will realize that this so-called historic deal is hardly what it is cooked up to be. In short order Canadians will realize that the money is by and large already spent since there was such a need in the system and provincial governments were facing such a pinch because of rising health care costs and declining federal funds. Canadians will know very soon that the government let them down and that we missed a wonderful opportunity in our history.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, the bill can most aptly be titled the postdated cheque bill because it promises a restoration of funds to provinces, to patients and to medical professions across the country which simply will not come on time.

The last dramatic action the government took with respect to Canada's health care system was that it made a deliberate choice to put the heaviest burden of its restraint measures upon Canada's health care and social systems. That was a deliberate choice. That was a clear demonstration of what it is now customary to call Liberal values. The Liberals picked first on the sick. They picked first on people who are in need in society. That is where the burden of the cuts came.

The last dramatic action was a series of unilateral cuts that were made without warning. They were devastating cuts that have done more to damage the health care system than any other single set of circumstances faced by the country in the last several years.

After five years of pain the government today suddenly calls for debate on Bill C-45, which would have cash transfers for health,

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post-secondary education and social services returned to 1994 levels, not by this year but by the year 2002-03.

Why did the government finally repent? This was not the government's will. It was pushed to this agreement by the provinces of Canada and by the virtual certainty that sooner or later it would have to stop hiding and face the people of Canada in a federal general election. Left to its own devices, the government would have continued to let the health care system drift into the disarray that has caused such hardship across the country.

Before these payments are made another 18 months will pass. Full restoration of the cuts will only occur eight years after the cuts were so brutally made. I repeat, those cuts were the single biggest factor in the erosion of the health care system in the country.

The change today is not driven by the erosion of the health care system. The change today is driven by a cynical political calculation of fear of an election in which the Liberals would be held to account for the damage they have done in hospital after hospital, home after home, family after family, right across Canada. They had every opportunity to change this policy earlier and they did not do that.

• (1315)

As I look at the legislative agenda of this parliament, I am struck by one thing. Whether the issue is employment insurance or whether the issue is health care funding, every initiative by the Liberal government is being driven by an attempt to repair the damage done by earlier Liberal Party initiatives. This is simply a damage control government. This is not a government that is seeking to serve the interests of the people of Canada.

The government claims this is full restoration of funding. It is not. The bill cheats the provinces, the patients and the health care professionals of Canada by at least \$3 billion. Had it been passed and effective this week and had moneys been committed this year, nearly \$3 billion more would be in the system than is in the system under the bill before us.

Canadians will not see any of the restored funds this winter. The first instalment only occurs next April 1. That is quite clear in Bill C-45. It is also clear with this cynical government that the Liberal Party ads are running but the money is not moving. That is the height of cynicism in a system like this.

The most important failure of this accord, apart from the fact that it is a postdated cheque that cheats the recipients, is that the government still has not assured the provinces of stable funding in the future. That means provinces, health care professionals and people who are ill or fear being ill are subject once again and still to the threat of massive unilateral cuts in health care funding by the federal government.

The funding for the next four years does not recognize actual health costs or other factors contributing to rising health costs.

[*Translation*]

The federal government has yet to guarantee the provinces stable funding in the future. The votes for the coming four years do not take into account the present costs of health care nor the other factors affecting these costs. Despite the reinstatement of the transfers, we have no assurance that the federal government will not unilaterally cut transfers once again in the event of an economic recession.

The arrogance of this government is beyond all. With an election on the horizon, it is now telling the provinces to push the opposition to pass the bill in a day. Why did the government not listen to the provinces and the opposition in recent years, when we were saying that unilateral cuts to health care had hurt Canadians considerably?

In January 1997, the provincial and territorial ministers of health informed the federal government that:

The cuts in federal transfer payments have resulted in a critical loss of revenues for the provinces and the territories, forcing them to make rapid changes to the system and seriously threatening their ability to maintain existing services. The reductions in federal funding accelerated the movement to reform a system that lacks the ability to absorb and sustain the adjustments that that requires.

Did we hear an announcement of funding for health care? No. How did the Prime Minister react? In response to the demand put to him by the premiers at the annual Saskatoon conference, the Prime Minister apparently expressed doubts about the unconditional payment of votes to the provinces. He wanted to impose conditions in order to prevent the provinces from funding income tax reductions with this money.

[*English*]

What is clear is that the Liberal Party's political agenda has held back health care in Canada. The federal government's interest is not in standards. That is the flag it flies behind. It is not interested in standards. It is interested in control. It does not matter what happens in hospitals across the country. It does not matter what happens to people who are sick or fear being sick. The government wants to control every single penny and if Canadians suffer that is just too bad. That is unacceptable in any civilized system.

• (1320)

At the same time the government removed its contribution and increased its demand for control. This is happening at the worst possible time in the evolution of the health care system because of the insistence on rigidity, the insistence on control and the absolute refusal to work with the other partners in the health care system to give us a better system.

We are living through a period now in which our health care system is assaulted by several fronts. There have been dramatic

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changes in technology. There are dramatic impacts upon the system by an aging population who will be able to stay alive and active much longer than before. There are profound changes brought by the possibilities of medication and by pharmaceutical and other developments.

This is a time of immense change. This is a time of great opportunities for leadership. This is the time when a Pierre Elliott Trudeau or a Lester Pearson would have risen to the occasion, but not this government. What the government has done is turn tail and run and let the health care system in Canada fall into tatters. That is absolutely unacceptable to any kind of Canadian.

Today we have a deal before us to restore the funding cuts which were made unilaterally. The agreement is overdue. It pays less than is owed but it is welcome because the system cannot stand to be starved any further. However, in all of this talk about putting some of the money back, in all of the focus on the postdated cheque, the clear reality is that we have not taken a single step closer to having a modern and contemporary health care plan based upon the principles of the Canada Health Act to ensure the health and security of Canadians into the next century.

There is money in the system now, or there will be in a couple of years, but there is no plan because this is a government which congenitally does not plan. It is a government of drift rather than a government of seizing the initiative and assuring the leadership of Canada.

The three day meeting of the health ministers this week came up with a nursing strategy that will establish committees to investigate the chronic shortage, to measure resources and to examine changing trends. Nurses have been saying for years that there were chronic shortages in the health care system. We hope we have nurses left in our system by the time the Liberal government finishes studying what is wrong. The ratio of practising registered nurses to the Canadian population in 1999 was one nurse for every 133 persons. In 1989 the ratio was 1:120. The average age of an RN employed in nursing in 1999 was 43, up from 41 in 1994.

The bill is silent on how it plans primary care reform. We know from the first ministers' conference that \$800 million will be invested over four years to support innovation and reform in primary care. We do not know from the bill how that funding will be distributed.

Elizabeth Witmer, the minister of health for Ontario, is quoted as saying that with the primary care funding, 70% will go to provinces and territories and 30% will go into a fund that will have some Canada-wide applications, but that money is not going to be made available until next April.

Ontario will have to put more money in to meet expectations until the federal cash arrives. Ontario can do that. Unfortunately,

not all the provinces in the country have that ability. This is an issue that is seriously missing in the government's health care deal.

The government claims that it is interested in the same quality of health care system across the country. However, it has forced this upon the provinces, giving them no alternative but to accept this or nothing, which leaves the poorer provinces with a lower standard of health care than the others. What kind of Liberal values does that represent? Where is the health plan for palliative care and hospital infrastructure? All of them are important aspects of primary health care reform.

Under Bill C-45 the provinces will know their funding for health care up to April 2005. That is five years. It takes 10 years to train a doctor. Doctors are integral to the reform of primary care. The Canadian Medical Association has just sent me, and I am sure other leaders, a copy of a letter in which says:

In the CMA's estimation the total cumulative funding commitments contained in the First Minister's agreement are more than \$17 billion less than what we forecasted as needed to ensure the sustainability of the health care system.

• (1325)

That is \$17 billion less. Not only is it less, it is late. There is far less here than meets the eye. The government is spending more money this month on health care ads than it is on health care. That is simply unacceptable in a nation like this.

Pharmaceutical management is an important part of our health care system. At the first ministers' meeting there was discussion about developing strategies for assessing the cost effectiveness of prescription drugs and means of drug purchasing costs. There is no concurrent commitment by the federal government to improve the timeliness of drug approval. Some pharmaceutical companies offer evidence that drug therapies reduce institutional care. The government has direct input in approving new drugs that help Canadians avoid lengthy institutional stays.

The Canadian Medical Association has stated that an unnecessarily long approval process delays access to new medications that may improve patients health status. However, the median time for regulatory approval of new drugs in Canada has been significantly longer than in countries such as the United Kingdom, Sweden. Our country has been criticized in several independent reviews on this issue.

The most important retreat that we evidenced today has not been the cut in funding, brutal and deadly though that has been in some cases. The most serious retreat has been the retreat from leadership by this federal government. The Liberals came to office at a time when the economy of Canada was growing sharply, largely because of initiatives which they opposed in opposition.

The OECD acknowledges that Canada's economic strength was won by the initiatives of a decade ago on trade, on the GST and on deregulation. The government did little to earn the surplus tabled

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last week and has done nothing at all to ensure those funds would be wisely invested in the future of Canada.

Despite the most favourable possible economic circumstances, the government has let the Canadian health care system fall into disarray. Was that inevitable? Did other governments of the world do that? Of course they did not. Other governments cared more about the health of their citizens than this Liberal government. That has shown up in the comparisons that have been made by independent agencies around the world.

This Canadian government sat back and let Canada's health system decline so sharply that even the World Health Organization ranked Canada behind most of the comparable world in the quality of our health care. Imagine that in the system of the Canada Health Act and in the system of medicare Canada is ranked by the World Health Organization behind most of the comparable world. Why is that? It is that we have a government in office that will not show the leadership that earlier Liberal governments showed. It lets things drift in the dust. It insists on jurisdiction but shows no leadership at all.

Canada has the resources and the tradition to be first in the world, but the government has brought us to 30th instead of first. If I may say so, it is not only the health care system that it has damaged.

I spent a good amount of time this summer talking to people in Kings county and Hants county in Nova Scotia who are very much involved in the health care system. Some are nurses, some are doctors, some are administrators and many more are people who are trying to get a doctor for a remote community or trying to ensure that it is possible for older people to travel easily to get their supply of drugs.

When I speak to people in the medical profession I hear over and over again that the problem is not just that the money is not there but there is a sense that there is no movement in the system, there is no plan and there is no hope. On a question like medical care where we have been in front of the world for so long, there is no hope.

Why is that? Is that the fault of Canada, the Canada that created the Canada Health Act, the Canada that created medicare? Of course not. That is the fault of the federal government in office today which has backed away time and time again from exercising the leadership that would have let Canada continue to be a leader in providing the highest quality health care to its citizens. The government has failed and Canadians are paying the price for that failure.

• (1330)

More is at stake here than the health care system, because what it has done on health care it is doing on other aspects of the Canadian

community. It is not drawing together people who want to be together. It looks for polarization. That is its new theme. It looks for ways to divide Canadians instead of heeding the hopes of parliament. Instead of heeding, it is responding to the requests of provinces. It ignores them until it is time finally with an election looming to bring them together and to offer a deal they cannot resist, a postdated cheque. That is not leadership.

A system of co-operation in Canada, of co-operation among governments with professionals, with concerned citizens, is what we need to restore the country. As in so many issues there has been no leadership by the federal government. Even now its action has been forced by the combination of provincial pressure and the impending election. There is not even the slightest hint of federal leadership in developing a new health plan for Canada.

As I listened to the debate, as I watch what this minister and this government are doing, it seems to me they are moving closer and closer to where the leader of Her Majesty's official opposition says he wants his government to be. The federal government is drawing back from leadership in health care.

I know I am reaching the end of my time, so let me conclude on this note. There is one level of government in Canada able to speak for all of Canada. It is not just a question of money. It is not just a question of jurisdiction. It is a question of authority. If the national government will not lead, the system will not succeed.

The government does not lead. Our system is in trouble because there has not been the leadership that is needed. The bill is a long overdue step in the right direction, but it is a faltering step. It is a step under duress. It is a step that promises more than it delivers. Unless there is a plan to go with the money then the Canadian health care system will continue in that long decline that began with the election of this careless, drifting government.

Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the right hon. member. I would like to remind him that in 1993 the government inherited a fiscal framework and a \$42 billion deficit.

Further, in the 1995 budget there was a non-confidence motion on the floor of the House by the then opposition Reform Party. The then leader of the Conservative Party, the member for Saint John, voted that the cuts the government made to try and put the fiscal framework back together were not deep enough. That is where the Conservative Party stood in 1995.

Another point we have to make is that there is not a member of parliament in the House that does not want a good health care system for the country. The notion that the member and his party are the only ones that care about a proper health care system is not factually correct.

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When a Prime Minister of Canada can pull 10 premiers together, including a separatist premier, and unanimously agree on a pact, I think that is something that Canadians respect.

Right Hon. Joe Clark: Mr. Speaker, I learned some time ago that when a member like the hon. member dwells so much in the past it is because he has a great fear of the future.

We are here talking about what needs to be done now because the system has suffered grievously over the last seven years, not only from the cuts but from the absolute absence of leadership.

He talks to me about bringing together different provinces and different groups. I know it can be done. I know it could have been done by any minister of health or any Prime Minister on that side who wanted to do it, but there was no will there to do it.

• (1335)

Finally on September 11, when the provinces forced the federal government to come to the table, it gave the provinces a take it or leave it deal, a postdated cheque that was better than nothing at all.

Do not talk to us about leadership. There has been no leadership on health care, no leadership by the government on making the federal and provincial government work together. This is a government that cuts and runs, a government adrift. It is the Canadian people who pay the price.

Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay—Boundary—Okanagan, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I will make this very brief. The only thing that is worse than the cuts and the policies of the federal government over there is the hypocrisy of the member who just spoke.

He talks about the cuts of the Liberal government. What about the fact that funding went down to 27% from 50% during his watch when he was a minister of the previous Conservative government? That is a cut of 46% of federal funding. Now he wants to point the finger at the people across the way who are no more to blame than the Conservatives are. They are all in it together: Liberal, Tory, same old story. Nothing has changed.

Right Hon. Joe Clark: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is a better poet when he quotes someone else than he is a contributor to reasonable debate in the House. We know the position of his party on health care. The position of his party is that the federal government should continue to withdraw. The quite startling position of his leader is that the role of the federal government in a system like that of Canada should be as a mediator.

Does the hon. member think there would ever have been a Canada Health Act had the Prime Minister of Canada acted only as a mediator? Does anybody in the House believe that there would

have been a Canada at all if the leaders of the federation had acted only as mediators?

There is a prominent role for the Government of Canada to be played in the health care system. The Canadian alliance reform party is running away from that role. Unhappily what it does by ideology the Liberal Party does by drift, running away from the leadership that the health care system needs.

Mr. John Solomon (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate the leader of the Conservative Party on his election.

I also make reference to the fact that the member for Kings—Hants talked about the Liberal legacy. I would like to ask a question of the leader of the Conservative Party about the Conservative legacy. In particular, under the Conservative government Bill C-91 was passed, the drug patent legislation, which provided 20 year monopoly pricing authority for pharmaceuticals with regard to prescription drugs.

The Liberals promised to repeal that if they got elected in 1993. In fact they did not repeal it. They enhanced it and we have therefore seen the cost of health care increase substantially due to the fact that prescription drug costs have increased substantially.

Will the leader of the Conservative Party now stand in the House and refute the legacy of the Conservative government when it passed Bill C-91 and support the repealing of Bill C-91?

Right Hon. Joe Clark: Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, that initiative was an initiative which has not only brought significant innovation to the development and discovery of new drugs in the country but consequently helped to address and cure diseases that would otherwise not have been addressed and cured.

It also provided tremendous economic momentum to many parts of the country. It helped Canada move into an era in which we could move, if we chose, to the frontlines in the new economy in research and development. It was precisely the kind of initiative that a government of a modern country has to take if it is to stay in the leadership of a rapidly changing world.

One of the things members of the New Democratic Party will have to learn some day is that we cannot run away from the world. There is no place to hide out. If we are to become leaders in the world then we have to engage the modern world on its terms. That is what that bill did. That is what this party intends to continue to do.

• (1340)

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one thing that concerns me about the health debate is that

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the Leader of the Opposition is now saying there should not be any national standards in which the federal government participates in setting, that the standards should be determined by the provinces.

If that kind of system were created, and he has said the standards should be determined by the provinces, we would end up with an end to national medical care. We would have a patchwork system that differs from province to province. We would have a system that is much better in wealthier provinces and poor in poorer provinces.

Would the leader of the federal Progressive Conservative Party disagree with the leader of the very conservative reform Canadian Alliance?

Right Hon. Joe Clark: Mr. Speaker, I certainly disagree with the position of the leader of reform alliance party which would have the Government of Canada withdraw, not only in the field of health but in many other fields that are important to the Canadian public interest, from the role of leadership that has helped make us a country. This is not simply a division over policy. This is a division over views of the country. Are we a country or are we not?

The position of the reform alliance party has Canada becoming less and less important to its parts and to its people. I reject that absolutely. I believe that in the establishment of national standards there has to be a very active role by the provinces, but also there has to be a very active presence by the national government, which is the only government of all people of Canada. That is the way in which we would intend to proceed as a government of this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, the bill on fiscal arrangements for the health sector. Earlier, my colleague, the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonnette, presented the Bloc Québécois' views on this bill.

First, it is important to stress that the Bloc Québécois endorses the criticisms that were just made by the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party. The Bloc Québécois agrees with a number of criticisms addressed to the government in view of the fact that this bill is being introduced on the eve of a general election, and in view of the incredible harm caused to the health system across the country, including in Quebec, by the government's cuts to transfer payments to the provinces.

It is surely because of the fight led by opposition parties in the House, including the Bloc Québécois, that the federal government has finally heard the voice of reason. The Liberal Party finally realized what terrible consequences its cuts have had, not only on the health program, but on its users, on sick people in hospitals and other health care facilities. Indeed, their situation got worse because of the drastic cuts made by the Liberal government.

It is easy to show what impact these cuts have had on Quebec's health program. As members know, between 1994 and 2000, the government made cuts of \$1 billion each year, that is, six years of cuts of \$1 billion, \$500 million of which could have been allocated to our health programs.

These cuts resulted in the elimination of more than one quarter of the budgets of Montreal's hospitals, more than one half of the budget of all the CLSCs in Quebec, almost the whole budget earmarked for home support, four times the annual budget of Ste-Justine hospital for children, more than three times the budget of the Royal Victoria Hospital, or over one quarter of the cost of the prescription drug insurance plan.

• (1345)

This is the real impact of the federal cuts to health, the cuts it had to re-examine. That re-examination was possible only because of an agreement and a coalition of the provincial premiers, and Quebec premier Lucien Bouchard played a pivotal role. He supported until the end the desire of the provinces to assume their responsibilities.

Unlike the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois and the government of Quebec have always insisted that the lead role in the health field be given back to the provinces, and thus to Quebec. The present constitution of Canada requires Quebec's jurisdiction over health to be respected.

Faced with this common front, these objections and this effective opposition from the parties in the House, the Bloc Québécois in particular, the government was forced to enter into an agreement at the last minute. This would not have been the case, if there had not been a federal election looming. That same federal election also appears to have prompted the government to table a last-minute bill aimed at implementing that commitment.

We have examined the bill. We have studied it, although we did not have much time to do so, but the Bloc Québécois finds that, even if its intention is to implement the agreement and the commitments arising out of the press releases issued in the aftermath of this agreement and the first ministers' meeting, there appear to have been a few little slips, a few little problems that the government ought to resolve itself by making some amendments. We are going to propose some amendments ourselves, if it does not listen to reason on this.

Two of the provisions in the bill present a serious problem and need to be brought to the attention of all hon. members, because they do not appear to properly implement the agreement reached between the first ministers a few weeks ago.

First, there is the very basic question of the amount of the funds that will be paid to each province under the commitment made by the Prime Minister of Canada and the provincial premiers. Sub-clause 2(2) of this bill indicates that the amounts will be determined in accordance with the terms of the trust indenture

establishing the trust into which will be deposited the amount of \$1 billion for medical equipment.

This is not very clear for a government that calls for clarity in other matters. This provision is silent on the amounts that were agreed upon during the first ministers' meeting. We have cause to be concerned about the fact that the government could use the establishment of the trust and use the discretion given it by this bill to change the amounts if that were its intention. This is why we in the Bloc Quebecois will insist that the bill mention the amounts agreed upon by the first ministers and that they be clearly established within the text of the bill.

There is a limit to the trust that may be put in the Liberal Party of Canada in these matters. It cut its health care transfers without consulting the provinces. It might want to use this bill and its subclause 2(2) in order to change the rules of the game as set by the first ministers.

There is one serious objection the government absolutely must take into account if it wants our party's support: if it introduces no amendments, we ourselves will move, at the appropriate stage, an amendment to correct a very significant failing of this bill.

• (1350)

Our party is also very concerned about certain words used in the bill, which are not at all consistent with the agreement reached by the first ministers. I am referring to clause 3 of the bill in which the Minister of Finance is invited to make a payment for health information and communications technologies and to allocate, as agreed by the first ministers, the sum of \$500 million. But this amount will go to a corporation to be named by order of the governor in council for the purpose of developing and supporting the adoption of Canada-wide standards.

We had thought that this idea of Canada-wide or national standards had been sorted out during the discussions at the first ministers meeting. Participants had said that the bill should talk about common standards, which was much less at odds with federal principles. Once again, we must remind the government that health is a provincial jurisdiction. It is the provinces who must assume leadership and jurisdiction in the matter of health care.

Here again, we see the federal government's intention to interfere in this jurisdiction by pushing for Canada-wide standards. Perhaps it is just a translation error, and if so, we would hope that the government would make the necessary correction. Canada-wide information standards has been rendered in French by *normes pancanadiennes*. If this is not an error of translation and the intention is that national Canada-wide standards must be adopted, we cannot agree. The Bloc Quebecois has always fought the idea that there ought to be national standards across Canada in an area that falls exclusively under provincial jurisdiction.

If this wording is maintained, it will be in violation of the agreement to which Premier Bouchard gave his approval at the first

minister's meeting. Let them not try to do in an underhanded way what they did not succeed in doing openly. The provinces managed at the conference to impose the point that health is a provincial jurisdiction in which the federal government ought not to interfere, as it always seems to have the intention of doing.

The Bloc Quebecois position is that this bill needs corrections to two of its fundamental provisions, because these are incompatible with the agreement on which a consensus was reached, an agreement between the provincial premiers and the Prime Minister of Canada.

If these amendments are not adopted, the Bloc Quebecois reserves its position, when the time comes to vote on this bill. It will always be mistrustful of a government which has shamelessly slashed transfer programs in the health field. The government has caused suffering to Quebecers and to many other Canadians, and sought to stifle the provinces at the very time that health care costs were increasing exponentially.

With these remarks I shall conclude my speech, trusting that the government will understand that this bill needs amending before it can earn Bloc Quebecois approval or assent.

• (1355)

[English]

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been consultations and I believe you would find consent to revert to routine proceedings for the purpose of tabling reports from the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

The Speaker: Does the parliamentary secretary have permission to put the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATIONAL DEFENCE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. George Proud (Hillsborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs on Bill C-41, an act to amend the statute law in relation to veterans benefits.

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PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present in both official languages the 15th, 16th and 17th reports of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

The 15th report deals with the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency and the Department of Finance handling tax credit claims for scientific research and experimental development. The 16th report deals with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the economic component of the Canadian immigration program. The 17th report deals with Royal Canadian Mounted Police services for Canada's law enforcement agencies. All of these reports come from the April 2000 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL PLOWING MATCH AND FARM MACHINERY SHOW

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Wellington county on hosting the International Plowing Match and Farm Machinery Show 2000. People from around the world attend this annual event which this year was held in my riding of Waterloo—Wellington.

It is important to note that the annual International Plowing Match and Farm Machinery Show is Canada's largest outdoor farm machinery show and the premier showcase for plowing in our country. The famous tent city on over 100 acres featured lifestyles exhibits and vendors from across Canada. Held every year in a different county or region within Ontario, the match of 2000 was proudly scheduled for historic Wellington county. This year over 150 competitors from across Canada competed in this event with \$35,000 in prize money.

Plowing matches give us an opportunity to celebrate Canada's agricultural heritage and educate Canadians, both urban and rural, on the history and the future of agriculture. This year's event was a great success.

A big thank you to George Robinson and all his committee members and volunteers for a great job well done. Congratulations.

HEALTH

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health likes to talk about supporting Canadians' access to timely, high quality health care. Let us talk about what is really going on in the trenches.

In Prince George the waiting time to see an orthopedic surgeon is three years. In Victoria the waiting time this year has doubled. Why? No beds, no money, no nurses. The result is that people are going down to the United States to get essential health care. The government's response is to bring back the funding to the 1993 level. In the words of Dr. Ralph Lapp, an orthopedic surgeon in Victoria, "Things are getting worse at a time when people are thinking that they are getting better".

The Minister of Health said that the status quo is not an option, that medicare will soon be unable to provide Canadians with timely access to health care until major reforms are taken. The Minister of Health said that one year ago. Where are those reforms?

* * *

THE LATE RIGHT HON. PIERRE ELLIOTT TRUDEAU

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Tuesday Canadians bid farewell to the Right Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau. "Before we go our separate ways," said Cardinal Turcotte, "let us reflect on what he means to us". From the lips of Justin, his dad reflects tolerance and respect, kindness and sharing, sanctity of the individual and pride in country. Never have I felt so proud as a Canadian.

As new immigrants, my wife and I were not eligible to vote when Mr. Trudeau first became prime minister in 1968, but our minds and hearts voted for him. He opened Canada's doors to immigrants from all over the world, championed diversity through our multiculturalism policy and enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms the balance of rights between citizenry and state.

He lived the noble purpose of politics: serve the people and challenge them to greater heights. In life he inspired a nation. In death he inspires us to keep on. To him, a true scholar of humanity and social justice, Canada says thank you.

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• (1400)

BREAST FEEDING

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the healthy outcomes of children is an important priority for all Canadians and Health Canada advises that breast feeding plays a very important part in that regard.

For the growing child breast feeding reduces infectious diseases during childhood, promotes optimal brain development and pro-

vides protection for premature infants against life threatening illnesses.

For the mother breast feeding reduces the risk of breast cancer and ovarian cancer and enhances the bonding process and decreases the risk of osteoporosis.

For the family and community breast feeding reduces the cost to families, protects the environment, improves the health of our population and decreases our health care costs.

Clearly, the benefits of breast feeding are very substantial. Therefore, I am very pleased that effective January 1, 2001 maternity and parental leave benefits will be extended to one full year so that more mothers will have the opportunity to breast feed their children during infancy.

* * *

STRATFORD FESTIVAL

Mr. John Richardson (Perth—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House today to announce that the Stratford Festival Theatre has been a recent beneficiary of a \$5 million donation to its For All Time Endowment Campaign from Senator Michael Meighen and his wife Kelly. This donation was not only the largest ever received by a festival but also the largest ever made to a not for profit theatrical organization in Canada.

The Meighen family's donation will help the festival enrich two of its major programs, one being the Stratford Festival Conservatory for Classical Theatre Training and the other to support the commissioning and development of new Canadian plays.

At this time I would like to thank Senator Meighen and Kelly for their truly wonderful gift. They have been heavily involved with the festival for well over 15 years. This gesture illustrates again the level of effort they have made to improve and promote Canada's theatrical arts.

* * *

[Translation]

WORLD MARCH OF WOMEN

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 17, the efforts of the Comité des femmes en Abitibi pour la marche mondiale des femmes will focus on the world rally converging on the United Nations building, in New York City, as part of solidarity events taking place all over the world.

“It's Time for Change” is the policy statement of the Canadian and Abitibi committee, which seeks a comprehensive reform of the fundamental laws by eliminating poverty and violence against women in Canada and in Quebec; increasing by 1% the portion of the global budget earmarked for social housing; improving old age

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security benefits to allow older women to have a decent standard of living; and supporting women who organize themselves so as to achieve equity in a democratic society.

I strongly support the 13 pressing claims that require a positive response from the governments, including the Quebec government.

* * *

[English]

CANCER AWARENESS

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, last April our three year old son was diagnosed with cancer and I just wanted to take a moment to thank my colleagues, my staff and my constituents for all their warm thoughts and prayers. It has been a great encouragement to all of us at home.

I want to say that as our son is battling leukemia there are many others that have battled cancer in this place.

I want to give a special thank you to the doctors, nurses and staff at the Children's Hospital in B.C., especially to Dr. Jeff Davis, Jenny Parkes and also to Dr. Finch in Mission. We know that at times like this it is family that means the most. I want to thank all my colleagues for their support during this really rough time.

I also want to encourage all of us to pull together. We celebrated the Terry Fox Run and the Run for the Cure which are very important things and we know that by working together cancer can be beaten.

The Speaker: Our prayers are with you.

* * *

[Translation]

THE LATE RIGHT HON. PIERRE ELLIOTT TRUDEAU

Mr. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the constituents of Mount Royal, for whom Pierre Elliott Trudeau will always be the most distinguished and esteemed MP, may I express my condolences to the Trudeau family at this moment of private and public mourning.

[English]

Pierre Elliott Trudeau, whom I knew for some 40 years as colleague, confrere and friend, was a unique combination of intellect, integrity, passion, wit and commitment. But the thing I remember most, and what I believe touched Canadians the most, was his personal courage and his moral courage inspired by a vision not only of who we were but what we might aspire to be.

● (1405)

It was this vision and the courageous pursuit of this vision that found expression in an enduring legacy of a more just society

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whose centrepiece is the charter of rights and freedoms and the values that underpin it.

While we mourn the passing of Canada's greatest statesman and citizen of the world, let us celebrate and be inspired by the heroic life he lived.

* * *

[Translation]

WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

Mrs. Maud Debien (Laval East, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on this, World Teachers' Day, I wish to pay tribute to those professionals who play a fundamental role in the development of any society.

By transmitting knowledge and values to our young people, they are helping to shape the Quebec of the future and, by providing upgrading for an increasingly large adult clientele, they are contributing to the vigour of our economy.

Because teachers guide and motivate student learning, their commitment and passion for knowledge have marked many of us.

I wish to underscore the government of Quebec's current campaign to promote education, the teaching profession and occupational and technical training. "The spark that lights a lifetime of learning" is the theme of this televised campaign, which was launched on September 21 and will last three years.

The Bloc Québécois wishes to express its gratitude to teachers, who are on the front lines battling against ignorance and complacency.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Pankiw (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we have now endured seven years of Liberal waste and mismanagement. However, I have good news. The Canadian Alliance has a plan to pay down our national debt and to lower taxes for everyone. We will end tax discrimination against single income families and replace the current Liberal tax system which penalizes hard work and overtime.

Under the Canadian Alliance plan, everyone will receive a basic personal deduction of \$10,000 including a \$3,000 deduction per child. A family of four under the current regressive Liberal tax plan starts paying tax at an income of only \$16,000. Under the Canadian Alliance plan, a family of four would not start paying income tax until its income exceeded \$26,000, and then only at the single rate of 17%.

In light of this very simplified and fair tax plan, Mr. Speaker, perhaps you yourself will join with millions of other Canadians in the next election and vote for the Canadian Alliance.

WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

Mr. Joe Jordan (Leeds—Grenville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Canadian teachers on this World Teachers' Day, the 300,000 teachers who work hard to expand the horizons of their students to ensure they are equipped to succeed in a changing world. Thanks to teachers, Canada prides itself on having one of the best public education systems in the world.

To acknowledge the invaluable contribution teachers make, Canada has initiated the Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence and is proud to be partnering with the Canadian Teachers' Federation in the new sharing teaching excellence pilot program, which also includes recipients of the former CTF Roy C. Hill awards program.

We are honoured to have with us today in Ottawa the president of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, Marilies Rettig and six award recipients: Linda Dickson, Doreen Casserly, Dalia Naujokaitis, Trudy Bradley, Ralph Carney, and Erica McCarthy.

I am certain that members of the House know a teacher who has made a difference in their lives. I invite the members to join me in thanking all of them on this World Teachers' Day.

* * *

WORLD WOMEN'S MARCH

Mrs. Michelle Dockrill (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, NDP): Mr. Speaker, October 15 is the World Women's March. This is an opportunity for women all over the world to gather together and continue to struggle for equality in society.

It is very unfortunate that we still have to struggle for equality. Violence against women is still a reality today. Women are still being attacked, abused, beaten, and even murdered. Just last night an advocate on the issue of violence against women herself became a victim. Sally McIntyre, an Ontario representative for the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, was attacked by her husband.

This leads me to ask just how this can happen in this country. We have a government that flaunts Canada as being the best country in which to live. But for whom? Certainly not women.

The government says that it is committed to the rights of women. The Prime Minister loves to remind us of how many women he has appointed to cabinet and the Senate. Does this help women who are continually being beaten? The answer is simple. It does not.

Canadian women call upon the government to begin working with us and not against us.

S. O. 31

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil, BQ): Mr. Speaker, all women in Quebec and in Canada know that the Liberal government is centralizing and arrogant.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage has no trouble coming up with \$12 million to promote Canadian unity, but the Secretary of State for the Status of Women prefers defending her government to defending women.

• (1410)

Even though everyone knows that one woman in five in Canada is poor, we did not see her defending pay equity or calling for the changes to EI that women wanted.

The Minister of Human Resources Development may remain oblivious to female workers' concerns, but the Prime Minister does not hesitate to impose his parental leave on the families and women of Quebec and thus dismiss their demands.

This government's track record is not one that favours women. The World March of Women should give members opposite a chance to understand what it means to live in the real world.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN ALLIANCE

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tonight the reform alliance releases its election platform and early reports show that one thing is clear. It plans to stick it to Atlantic Canada.

The Alliance is committed to ending all funding for ACOA, privatizing CBC television, privatizing VIA Rail, slashing the budget of HRDC, eliminating Technology Partnerships Canada, gutting the employment insurance system, removing mechanisms for the federal government to enforce the principles of the Canada Health Act and eliminating subsidies for farmers and fishers. All of this is expected to be in the Alliance's platform to be unveiled tonight.

Who wrote the Atlantic Canada section of this brutal platform? John Mykytyshyn. With this kind of platform, the Alliance will get exactly what it got in the last election in Atlantic Canada; zip.

* * *

GUN REGISTRY

Mr. Mark Muis (West Nova, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice does not get it. Her long gun registry is nothing but a colossal failure. Rather than admit her government's mistake, she is spending millions trying to convince Canadians that this new registry will somehow reduce crime.

Is it not ironic that the Minister of Justice televised ads portraying two hunters sitting at a bar discussing the long gun registry? I am sure her intent was not to encourage drinking and hunting, however, one cannot help but notice the irony.

Once a strong advocate for the new long gun registry, the Canadian Police Association is now withholding its support until it sees indications that the registry will not siphon away the much needed resources from enforcement agencies.

Let us face it. This registry will not have any impact on reducing crime in the country. Those intent on committing crime will not register their firearms. Therefore, what purpose is this long gun registry serving? At present it is only serving to save face for a government that is totally out of touch with millions of law-abiding Canadian gun owners.

Our party is committed to cancelling—

The Speaker: The hon. member for York West.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Alliance proposes a flat tax which would have exactly the opposite effect of a fair and progressive tax system.

Under this plan, the higher the income, the bigger the tax break. For example, a taxpayer earning \$30,000 would receive a tax reduction of about \$600, while another taxpayer earning \$200,000 would receive a break of over \$22,000. That is not fair.

The Liberal government believes tax cuts must benefit all Canadians, but first they must benefit those who need it the most: low and middle income Canadians and families. Our five year plan will reduce personal income taxes by an average of 15%. Combined with cuts in the last three budgets, annual personal income tax reductions total 22%, and for families with children, at least 30%. That is a fair and equitable approach to income tax reform.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, four years ago the auditor general warned that contamination at abandoned mines is a serious problem. There are 25,000 abandoned mines exposed to air and water. The waste rock is washed into the ground and eventually reaches groundwater.

The environment minister began addressing this problem at abandoned mine sites by committing \$38 million to help clean up the Sydney tar ponds. The estimated cost of cleaning up contaminated sites on federal lands alone is \$2 billion. This is a bill the

Oral Questions

mining industry should pay, but it is left to the government to find funds to deal with the pollution at abandoned mines.

I urge the Minister of Finance to allocate in the next budget funds for cleanup and also to propose a plan so that from now on mining companies will be responsible for the environmentally sound closing of mines.

* * *

• (1415)

VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Calgary East to give my thanks to the countless volunteers who give their time and energy to make their communities a better place to live.

Last weekend I attended a volunteer appreciation night in the community of Dover. It was my pleasure to spend an evening with these dedicated volunteers whose commitment and efforts help to make Dover a better community for everyone.

I cannot stress strongly enough that these volunteers are a sense of pride for all Canadians.

I therefore today take great pride in acknowledging all volunteers who contribute to the following community associations in my riding: Abbeydale, Albert Park/Radisson Heights, Applewood Park, Marlborough, Marlborough Park, Crossroads, Dover, Erin Woods, Forest Heights, Forest Lawn, Inglewood, Millican Ogden, Lynnwood, Penbrooke Meadows and Southview.

My heartfelt thanks go to all these community association volunteers. We are proud of them.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

YUGOSLAVIA

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are gripped today by the latest turn of events in Yugoslavia. Protesters have taken over the Yugoslav parliament. Apparently some people have been injured and some have been killed and there is real potential for even further violence.

Can the government give us an update on the situation in Yugoslavia? Can it assure us that Canadian nationals in Yugoslavia are safe and that there is a plan in place to ensure their safety during this period of unrest?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada applauds the courage of the Yugoslav people who have

taken to the streets over the past 10 days to defend their victory by peaceful means. We are concerned by the violence which erupted at today's demonstration but we understand it is as a result of deep frustration on the part of those who are protesting the denial of their democratic rights.

We urge Mr. Milosevic to accept the clearly expressed will of the Yugoslav people and step down now.

I will get more information for my hon. friend with respect to the other part of his question, which is—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Fraser Valley.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned with the possibility that the fledgling democracy in Yugoslavia could degenerate into even further violence if things do not progress properly.

Has the government been in touch with our allies to ensure that we have a common approach and a common front to assist that stable transition to what we hope will be a stable democracy?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the very questions the hon. member has raised are being discussed today at a meeting of the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and Canada has a representative at those meetings.

I will endeavour to keep my hon. friend informed as to the progress of these discussions, again on the points my hon. friend has raised.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, on another more specific front, has the Canadian government been in touch with our Russian counterparts to ask the Russian government to exert all possible influence that it has on Mr. Milosevic to get him to recognize the democratically elected government in Yugoslavia? Has he been in contact specifically with the Russians and asked them to do their job as well?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not have that specific information but I am confident that we are in contact with all the relevant players so we can collectively play a constructive role in this very difficult situation.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know from the government if it has had any contact with the coalition in Yugoslavia which won the elections, headed up by Mr. Kostunica. I would also like to know if there have been any specific requests of Canada from the coalition and, if so, what has been the response. I wonder if the Deputy Prime Minister might have some kind of a specific answer to some pretty important questions.

Mr. Denis Paradis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will continue to follow events in the federal republic of Yugoslavia very closely.

Oral Questions

Our embassy in Belgrade is monitoring the situation in co-ordination with democratic NGOs and like-minded countries. As the Deputy Prime Minister said, we are also in close contact with international partners, including Russia.

• (1420)

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts are with all Canadians who have relatives who might be affected by the unrest in Yugoslavia.

I have a question about two Canadians in particular, Shawn Going and Liam Hall, who have unfairly been held prisoners in a jail in Belgrade since August.

Has the government been in touch with Mr. Hall or Mr. Going since the protest began? If so, what is their status, what is their condition and what steps have been taken to ensure their safety during this period of unrest?

Mr. Denis Paradis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the decision to extend the remand period is unacceptable for those prisoners. Canada believes that there is no legitimate reason for their continued detention, which is clearly motivated by political purposes.

We appreciate the efforts of the OSCE, the United Nations and our bilateral partners to help secure the release of the four men. We will continue to press the FRY authorities to secure their quick release.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Yugoslav people have risen up following the decision by the constitutional court to annul the elections. Former president and tyrant Milosevic has apparently fled, and President Clinton has asked Russia to recognize the former leader of the opposition, Mr. Kostunica, as president.

I would ask the Deputy Prime Minister if the Government of Canada also intends to recognize Mr. Kostunica as the winner of the elections and the rightful president of the Yugoslav federation.

[*English*]

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that opposition candidate Kostunica won a majority in the first round of presidential elections on September 24.

We do not accept the validity of yesterday's ruling by the constitutional court which tried to overturn the September 24th elections and called for new ones next summer. This is clearly a political move on the part of Mr. Milosevic to retain power.

Therefore we urge Mr. Milosevic to accept the clearly expressed will of the Yugoslav people and, as I said before, to step down now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to the latest news, President Milosevic has left Yugoslavia. President Clinton is asking Russia, a key player on the issue, to recognize Mr. Kostunica as the president of the Yugoslav federation, because he was duly elected, as the Deputy Prime Minister has just acknowledged.

I therefore ask the Canadian government a second time if it will recognize that Mr. Kostunica is indeed the president elect of the Yugoslav federation.

[*English*]

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think I have stated the government's position quite clearly. The situation in Yugoslavia is certainly in a state of great flux. I do not think it would be appropriate to add anything to my answer for the time being.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have just learned with great delight that Milosevic has left the capital, but we do not know yet what the army will do.

Could the Deputy Prime Minister make a commitment on behalf of the government that Canada would not tolerate any violence perpetrated by the army against the people's movement?

Mr. Denis Paradis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we hold, as we indicated in the latest throne speech, certain values in this country, and personal safety is one of them. This is something we advance in the world. We are obviously opposed to violence and we congratulate the Yugoslav people on their courage in very trying circumstances.

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Milosevic, who is responsible for so many deaths and so many crimes against humanity, has fled.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister assure us that Canada will remain firm in its desire to have Milosevic brought before the international criminal court at The Hague?

[*English*]

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our position on this matter remains the same as it always has been. I will add something to the answer given to her previous question. It is the international practice to recognize states rather than individual governments of those states, but we are demanding that Mr. Milosevic step down now.

Oral Questions

• (1425)

HEALTH

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the launch of an \$8 million federal ad campaign on health takes self-serving, cynical politics to an all time low in this country.

Unbelievably, the political ads brag about the so-called Liberal plan. Would that be the plan for pharmacare, the plan for home care or the plan to halt the privatization of our entire health care system?

Is the Liberal government so arrogant that it feels free to spend Canadians' own hard earned money to engage in this false advertising?

The Speaker: We are getting a little bit close. The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the NDP claims it wants an open, transparent approach to government. If NDP members are serious about this they would applaud our advertising which aims to give solid information to Canadians about a great achievement in improving health care in many different areas all across the country, a program supported by NDP provincial governments which obviously reject the hon. member's narrow and closed minded approach to government information.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people are prepared to have their government spend money on disseminating information, accurate information, but they are not prepared to have government spend money on propagating political propaganda. There is a difference, even if the government does not recognize it.

It is absolutely clear and transparent, all right, that the Liberal ads are designed to blend right into the federal Liberal election campaign. If there is no violation of the law, there is certainly a violation of trust.

Will the government announce an immediate suspension—

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise and the innuendo of the hon. member's questions. They are both wrong.

Speaking of taxpayers' money, taxpayers seem to be willing to pay for the nonsense the member expresses in her questions by paying her salary. Why does she not withdraw that position?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. The right hon. leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, they had better bring the boss back.

I have a question for the Deputy Prime Minister about a sorry and sordid chapter in Canadian history: the abuse of aboriginal children in residential schools.

The federal government has been the object of legal action brought against the government, which of course has the legal resources to defend itself, but the government has now named as co-defendants several churches which do not have the legal means to defend themselves.

I am not asking a question about the details of litigation. I am asking a question about public policy. What is the public policy reason of the government—

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from my knowledge of the matter, the premise of the hon. leader's question is not accurate.

I have been told that in at least 70% or more of the cases, the claimants are suing not just the federal government but they are also suing various churches directly.

I must say that the government policy is to attempt to work out mutually satisfactory solutions if possible outside of litigation. For that purpose, I have been asked, on behalf of the government, to initiate a new dialogue directly with churches, which is already underway.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, this is a serious matter. I will certainly check the premise of my question, as I hope the Deputy Prime Minister will check the premise of his answer.

• (1430)

Let me ask him a question about those churches that are a part of this action only because the Government of Canada has joined them to the action. However many those churches specifically are, will the Government of Canada assist those churches in meeting the legal costs that flow from the fact that they have been joined to this action by the public policy decision of the Government of Canada?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all the hon. member should look at the specific circumstances of each case. I do not think it is right for him to say there is a general public policy approach on the particular point he has raised.

With respect to what he asked about costs of litigation, this is one of the areas among many that I am starting to explore with church organizations in the dialogue with them that I have undertaken and which will be continuing as early as next week.

*Oral Questions***MAMQUAM BLIND CHANNEL**

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has announced millions of dollars in contracts for dredging sandbars in Ontario and Atlantic Canada. I have been requesting that the ministry dredge the Mamquam blind channel in Squamish, B.C. for over two years. The previous minister turned me down, and I quote from his letter, which said that dredging “should be funded by the private sector” and he would no longer be providing dredging in commercial channels.

Apart from the impending election, what has changed?

Mr. Lawrence D. O’Brien (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will certainly take the information and the question under advisement. We will report to the hon. member at a future date.

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the people of British Columbia have been waiting for over two years to have this very unsafe channel dredged but were told there was no more money for dredging from the government and that it has to be done by the private sector.

What is the difference between an unsafe harbour in British Columbia and an unsafe one in Ontario and Atlantic Canada?

Mr. Lawrence D. O’Brien (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, safety of all harbours and all ports is a very fundamental and important issue. I can say that the fundamental issue is safety. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans will look at all aspects and we will report to the member at a later date.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SHIPBUILDING

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is up to its ears in the greatest of contradictions.

This morning, the Liberal MPs passed my bill on shipbuilding, clause by clause. On the opposite side of the coin, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance objected with every ounce of his energy to that bill being passed on third reading.

Can the Minister of Industry tell us on whose behalf the representative of the Minister of Finance is objecting to the prompt passage of my bill?

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat debatable whether this matter has anything to do with government policy.

All I can say is that the procedure for handling a private member’s bill in parliamentary committee, the stage for the report to the House of Commons, the stage for adoption of the report, and then the third reading stage, are all well known and are all covered by the standing orders of the House of Commons.

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have sufficient experience in this House, after seven years, to know that if the government wanted to get this bill through quickly, it had only to use the proposal by my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot this morning, but it refused.

Why does it refuse to pass this bill promptly when it is so important and so urgent for shipbuilding in Canada?

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are scores of private members’ bills, all of them on the order paper, dealing with such matters as increased benefits for firefighters, electoral democracy and the criminal code, just to mention the debates scheduled for the next few days. Why should the hon. member’s bill bypass all the other members’ bills? That is the question.

* * *

[*English*]

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, according to the public accounts, Canadian taxpayers are the big losers again in this year’s \$80 million write-off of bad loans by the government’s regional development agencies.

It does not matter how it is dressed up, whether it be grants, loans or repayable contributions, the bottom line is that these programs waste millions of dollars every year.

• (1435)

With this kind of record, why is the government still in the business of handing out Canadians’ hard-earned tax dollars in corporate welfare and other vote buying schemes?

Hon. George S. Baker (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Alliance has already announced that it wants to do away with all assistance to the high unemployment areas of Canada, to end all of the regional development agencies. To Alliance members it is a case of survival of the fittest here in Canada. This is one big game of *Survivor* with them. The next thing they will be announcing Richard Hatch as their policy director.

Oral Questions

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, no matter what the minister says, he cannot hide the fact that over \$80 million of taxpayers' money was wasted which could have gone to purchase dozens of MRIs to help ease Canada's health care crisis.

The fact is, regional development agencies are chronic losers and the minister knows it. Since 1995 the government has written off over \$280 million in bad loans. Now it wants to expand this program with money from the discredited TJF.

Given this record of mismanagement, why does the minister not scrap this program altogether?

Hon. George S. Baker (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct in that a certain amount of these write-offs, these grants, \$4 million, \$5 million had to be written off, not forgiven but written off by the public accounts the other day. We agree with them. That is why we changed the system to loans and no more grants.

In fact, over half of the grants that the hon. member is talking about were given while his bosom pals, the Tories, were in power.

* * *

[Translation]

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the transfer of the Rosemont grant to Saint-Maurice, the government is still refusing to answer our questions, using the fact that the matter is under police investigation as an excuse.

Will the President of the Treasury Board tell us why the amount of the \$165,984 grant appears in the public accounts of 2000 under the heading "Losses of public money due to an offence or illegal act", when the Minister of Human Resources Development said yesterday that the police investigation was ongoing?

[English]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the opposition members should stop playing games. They should know that the crown reimburses—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. René Laurin: It is easier in French.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Speaker, I will say it in French so that the members opposite get it.

I hoped that the opposition would stop playing games, because they are well aware that this was an unintentional error. The Deputy Minister of Human Resources Development has been in touch today with the secretary of the treasury board about this and has also asked her to inform the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

I can table this communication in the House, if members wish.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it may not have been intentional, but it is now under a criminal investigation.

Here is another example of a company, Contact Group Solution, which is not under investigation. On March 29, 1999, that company, established in the riding of the President of the Treasury Board, received a \$1 million grant from Human Resources Canada to create 552 jobs by October 1999. However, only 347 jobs were created. On February 2000, a handwritten note confirmed that the objectives of the project had not been met.

Could the minister tell us whether or not she recovered the excess money received by the company, that is, the money for the 205 jobs that were not created?

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. member is referring to very specific cases.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Hon. Don Boudria: Of course, he got a very satisfactory answer to the previous question.

Some hon. members: Yes, yes.

Hon. Don Boudria: He knows very well that the information was false. We will look into his latest allegation.

* * *

● (1440)

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, for the past seven years the government has mismanaged and played politics with the military procurement process, with the taxpayer paying half a billion dollars in 1993 when the Cormorant or EH-101 contract was scrapped. Now on the eve of delivery we have received access to information documents that reveal serious deficiencies in the Cormorant.

Will the minister tell the House when the first Cormorant search and rescue helicopter will be available and how much it will cost?

Oral Questions

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it will cost a lot less than what it would have cost had we gone along with the Tory proposal which the Alliance now appears to be going along with. We will not take delivery of any helicopter unless it is in fit condition, good to fly and meets our operational requirements.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have been waiting a long time for the delivery of the search and rescue helicopters and so has the military. Now we have learned from the government's own documents that the helicopters will possibly be delayed for another 30 months at an additional cost of \$18.5 million. The government has meddled in this process for far too long and that is why we are running into these problems.

Will the Minister of National Defence accept the blame for this fiasco?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): There is no fiasco, Mr. Speaker. The only fiasco is over there on the opposition benches. Those members cannot seem to read documents very well, as I have found in the past.

The operational requirements of the military have always been first and foremost for the government. We want to make sure that we get the right kind of helicopter that meets military needs and is the best value for the taxpayer dollar. We will continue to operate on that basis.

* * *

[Translation]

COLLÈGE MILITAIRE DE SAINT-JEAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the budget of the collège militaire de Saint-Jean went from \$37 million in 1994 to \$5 million in 1999 and to zero now, as indicated in the new lease signed in August 2000.

My question is for the Minister of National Defence. What is the government waiting for to be true to its word and to announce the return of officers to the college, so as to ensure stable funding for it? Is he waiting to announce it during the upcoming election campaign?

[English]

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a good news agreement in respect to Saint-Jean. Not only is the old military college property going to be maintained, enhanced and improved, but there will be new jobs and new economic development as a result of our agreement with le Conseil économique du Richelieu. As a result of our new requirements for the military, we will have an expanded military operation there. It is good news for the city.

[Translation]

FIRE PREVENTION WEEK

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we are all aware of the presence here on the Hill of firefighters from a number of municipalities, who are here to mark Fire Prevention Week.

I would like to know whether the Minister of Labour could tell us what the Government of Canada is doing to mark this week.

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure today of launching Fire Prevention Week right here on Parliament Hill.

The Department of Labour has an obligation to support public awareness campaigns such as Fire Prevention Canada. One of its very important programs is "Learn Not to Burn", and this morning a young girl from New Brunswick, a six-year-old, was awarded its medal for bravery, for saving her family from a fire in their home.

I would like to congratulate all the schools and all the firefighters for their work with our young people about fire prevention.

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• (1445)

[English]

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the legal fight between Karla Homolka and Correctional Service Canada gets more ridiculous every day.

Homolka is a convicted killer. She is using taxpayer money through legal aid to fight her transfer to Saskatoon for psychiatric assessment. Even worse, we now find that the latest move is to seek an injunction to block the transfer through the Federal Court of Canada.

Why does the solicitor general agree in the first place that prisoners should have the right to refuse a transfer from one prison to another, much less use legal aid through taxpayer money to enforce it?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this has been a difficult and troubling situation for all Canadians, and in particular for the families of the victims, but I can assure my hon. colleague that I have been advised by Correctional Service Canada that the final decision has been made. This offender will be transferred.

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that is interesting because unless the assessment is completed by January 6, Homolka will be out of prison having served just two-thirds of her sentence. This fight, at

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taxpayer expense, I might add, will ensure a delay in the assessment and she will walk.

Why did the solicitor general get into this mess in the first place, with just three months to go before January 6? Why is it that we could not have had this done six months ago or even three months ago? Why are we in this situation right now?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure my hon. colleague would not want to give Canadians any incorrect information. I am sure he would not want to indicate something is to happen that will not happen.

I have indicated quite clearly to my hon. colleague and to all members of the House that Correctional Service Canada has indicated that the policies will be followed.

* * *

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the HRDC minister told the House that the majority of debt in her department was related to the Canada student loan program.

Is the minister satisfied to just write off the debt, or will she face the music and own up to the fact that her own government, after seven years of neglect, has caused a staggering increase in tuition fees which is related to the student debt load?

There is a very clear choice. Is it tax breaks for the big banks and big businesses? Or, will she help students by pulling together her provincial counterparts to roll back tuition, to give students—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources Development.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, may I say that a number of people in the field have told us that the government's programs for students were more than acceptable and that they were very satisfied with them.

I would add, however, that the program to which the hon. member refers is a provincial government program and she ought to address her comments to provincial representatives.

* * *

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Earlier this year the minister was with me when he met first nations

veterans, led by Grand Chief Howard Anderson. He knows that those veterans were discriminated against after the first world war, the second world war and the Korean war, in comparison to non-first nations veterans. I also have a private member's bill, as the minister is aware, advocating their cause in the House of Commons.

Is the minister ready to announce now that he will right this historical wrong and compensate these people who fought and died for our country?

Hon. George S. Baker (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did have representation concerning this matter from the hon. member and from my colleague, the hon. member for Churchill River, who is in the House today.

We are in the process of setting up a national round table, chaired by first nations veterans, to investigate exactly what happened during and after the wars. If it is found that these veterans were treated unfairly, the Government of Canada will resolve this issue.

* * *

● (1450)

SHIPBUILDING

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, for the past seven years I have been asking the Minister of Industry for a national shipbuilding policy. We always get the same rhetoric. The rhetoric from the minister is that there is an overcapacity.

There would be no overcapacity, if we had a national shipbuilding policy that made us competitive with all the other countries around the world that build ships.

Will the minister bring forth a national shipbuilding policy immediately, based on the recommendations from the shipbuilding industry—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Industry.

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would the member explain to me immediately how it could be that a Canadian domestic policy would resolve an international overcapacity?

I just do not understand what she is talking about. What she wants is for us to take taxpayer money, scoop it out of their pockets and pour it into an industry to compete with subsidies that are too high internationally.

* * *

SHIPYARDS

Mr. John Herron (Fundy—Royal, PC): Mr. Speaker, we will try to bring some reason to this debate. The government's inaction

in modernizing financial instruments for Canada's shipyards has devastated Canada's shipyards and their coastal communities.

My question is for the industry minister. Will the Government of Canada be making any formal announcement through legislation within the finance minister's economic statement, or in a stand alone statement on its own, on enhancing financial instruments for Canada's shipyards within the next 21 days?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not happen to have a calendar on me at the moment, but I might note that what the hon. member and his colleagues have been asking for is that Canada essentially disregard the obligations we have undertaken in the context of the OECD.

I find it striking strange that party would suggest that we ignore our international obligations with respect to commitments not to subsidize an industry.

* * *

WESTERN DIVERSIFICATION

Mr. John Harvard (Charleswood St. James—Assiniboia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for western economic diversification. As he well knows, the St. Boniface General Hospital Research Centre is a leading research facility in Winnipeg. In fact it is in his riding.

Recently it identified a gap between its research and the delivery of care at the hospital. Could the minister explain what might be done to assist the research centre in closing that gap?

Hon. Ronald J. Duhamel (Secretary of State (Western Economic Diversification)(Francophonie), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has invested \$2.3 billion in western Canada since 1987. This is another \$5 million investment in leading edge research.

This \$5 million will trigger 45 million other dollars and \$35 million from the private sector. This permits clinical trials. It permits the bridge between research and practice. It is one of three facilities in Canada—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. minister has time.

• (1455)

Hon. Ronald J. Duhamel: It will create 250 new jobs in research. They do not understand that. They do not want to invest in Canadians. They do not understand how it works. They do not like good news. Look at the contortions. Frankly I am embarrassed by their reaction.

Oral Questions

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the public accounts of Canada tabled last week contain an amount of \$200 billion for aboriginal claims of various kinds.

While the Minister of Finance can boast about his \$12 billion surplus, we are talking about \$200 billion here. We want to know how the government will squeeze that money out of the taxpayers to come up with that kind of cash.

Hon. Robert D. Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows because he asked this question last year, I think, that is the total amount projected if every claim is looked after at its uppermost limit. Those are the raw numbers. Obviously those claims will not be dealt with in that fashion.

Our numbers are closer to \$11 billion. The member was told that last year. He continues to flog the \$200 billion. I think that kind of rhetoric is not helpful to negotiations with first nations. It is not helpful to our relationship with first nations, and he should desist from doing those stupid things.

The Speaker: Order, please. I ask the hon. minister to withdraw the word stupid.

Hon. Robert D. Nault: I withdraw that, Mr. Speaker.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the report she tabled this morning, the Commissioner of Official Languages wrote:

It is unacceptable, after three decades and despite numerous interventions by successive Commissioners, that, year after year, we have to call attention to so many recurring deficiencies in federal offices designated to provide service in both official languages and have to decry the persistent inertia of federal institutions and of this government.

My question is simple. What specific measures does the government intend to take in response to this unprecedented condemnation of its action in this area?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government's commitment to official languages is really unshakeable.

We pay more attention to official languages than does the Bloc Québécois, which waited 45 minutes before putting this question.

Points of Order

I must say that we welcomed the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages. She set out her findings clearly, and that will enable us to reaffirm our renewed leadership in the area of official languages.

* * *

[English]

TRADE

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister for International Trade will know that the Canadian firm Methanex has launched a \$1 billion lawsuit against the U.S. under chapter 11 of NAFTA.

Until now these lawsuits have been conducted behind closed doors with no input from the public. The International Institute for Sustainable Development in Winnipeg has made a request to be involved in the hearing, along with other NGOs, so that their concerns can be made known. The panel has reserved judgment on this and has given Canada until next Friday to make its position known.

I would like to know from the minister what is the position of the Canadian government on this. Will it be supporting the right of NGOs to intervene in these hearings and make their concerns known in the name of transparency and all the other rhetoric the minister talks about?

• (1500)

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of meeting with that NGO which does remarkable work in the field of environment. I commended that organization and read the brief it would like to table.

Our officials are in discussions with people at justice. We also have to see, along with the government of Mexico and the government of the United States, what sort of precedent it would create. I certainly commend the contribution IISD has been making on that file. We will advise the House on what our government will decide after consultations with our trade partners.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of a former president of Botswana, Mr. Masire.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have the regular Thursday question for the House leader

on the government side. I understand that some changes may be happening, but could he give us the business of the House for the rest of the day, for the rest of the week and for the following week?

In particular, could he tell us the status of the veterans allowance changes which I think all of us in the House would like to make sure pass as quickly as possible?

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we will consider Bill C-44, the employment insurance amendments. If we complete that by the end of the day, which I hope we do, at least to second reading, we would then resume consideration of Bill C-45, the health bill. Needless to say, I would like us to advance with that one as well.

• (1505)

I thank hon. members for agreeing to tabling the report of the standing committee in reference to Bill C-41 earlier this day. Tomorrow, pursuant to an informal agreement between House leaders, I would propose to do report stage and third reading of Bill C-41 in succession, pursuant to this agreement.

The backup bills, and I intend to discuss this matter further with House leaders, would then be Bill S-17 regarding marine liability and possibly Bill C-28 respecting motor vehicles, but I will discuss it with House leaders a little later on.

Monday after the Thanksgiving break will be a Bloc opposition day. Later in the week we will attempt to clear some of the unfinished business from last week and this week, including Bill C-45 and Bill C-44 at whatever stage they are then and to advance them as much as possible; Bill C-17 which I described before; Bill S-17; and a very short but important bill, Bill S-26, the B.C. Telus bill, which I understand there is some urgency to adopt.

Needless to say, we are still committed to moving to the extent we can on Bill C-3, the youth justice bill, if we can have a successful negotiation, and then on to Bill S-25, the defence production bill, if received from the other place.

* * *

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During question period, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources Development announced that she was tabling a letter, but the letter never made it to the table.

Points of Order

I just want to ensure that the letter will be tabled as soon as possible, since we need it for the follow-up to question period. We expected it to be tabled during question period.

The Speaker: First of all, my dear colleague, things would be different if documents were tabled during question period, but that is not the case.

The parliamentary secretary is here now and if she wants to table a letter, she would first have to ask for the consent of the House. She now has the floor.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do ask the House for consent to table the letter I referred to during question period. It is in fact a letter sent to the treasury board secretary.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table the document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[English]

BILL C-247

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, as I advised the clerk, I rise on a point of order. Last June 14 the House leader of the official opposition raised a point of order regarding his Motion No. 425 on the order paper, which reads as follows:

That a message be sent to the Senate to acquaint their honours that this House wishes to convey its dismay regarding the undue delay in the Senate's progress on Bill C-247, an Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. Members of the House of Commons have expressed their distress at the unnecessary delay in dealing with this legislation and in the interest of co-operation between the two chambers, and, ultimately service to the Canadian public, the House feels compelled to express its serious concerns regarding the handling of Bill C-247 by the Senate.

I believe he intended the motion to be placed on the order paper so as to be moved at routine proceedings under the rubric motions.

I have concerns of my own about the fate of Bill C-247 and I will just read one aspect of it. It provides that a sentence imposed for the offence of sexual assault under section 271 of the criminal code shall be served consecutively to any other sentence for an offence under that section.

• (1510)

I was awaiting your ruling, Mr. Speaker, before taking any further action of my own on this matter. The hon. member's point of order is well taken. I wait for the day he moves the motion so I can participate in the debate and vote in favour of his motion.

This is important because Bill C-247 was gutted at committee by the government leadership. Thankfully it was restored by the power of the backbench and opposition members when it was reported back to the House. Since the government backbenchers are feeling a little taken of advantage of and abused lately, this would be a perfect time in my opinion for them to flex their muscles again on the issue. Speaker Fraser ruled, and I quote:

The rubric motions usually encompasses matters related to the management of the business of the House and its committees, but it is not the exclusive purview of the government, despite the government's unquestioned prerogative to determine the agenda of business before the House.

There is speculation that the Prime Minister will call an election. In that event Bill C-247 would die on the Senate order paper. I suspect we know that the government did not want the bill to come into law and there it sits in the Senate some 15 months. I believe we have an obligation to the House to go back to the Senate and ask where that bill is and when it is coming forward.

What I ask of the Chair is that the Chair communicate to the Senate its concern about the fate of Bill C-247. I am sure we do not want that bill to die in the Senate after going through all this hard work and difficult time in debate to make sure it got out of here as best we can after third reading.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his intervention on Bill C-247, which as he says is an act to amend the criminal code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

The House will recall that this is already the subject of private member's Motion No. 425 standing in the name of the hon. member for Fraser Valley. On June 14 he also raised a point of order concerning the motion and its progress in the Senate.

Since the issues raised by the hon. member for Langley—Abbotsford and Fraser Valley are the same, it is my intention to return a ruling to the House in the next few days. It will be returned.

It is not the purview of the Chair to wonder or question when or if there will be an election. We will carry out our duties as if we have five years to serve here. I will get back to the House with my ruling in the next few days.

The hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona came to see me about a question of privilege and I have a direct question for him. I said he could raise it. I presumed it was a question of privilege arising out of today's oral question period.

Mr. Bill Blaikie: It is not out of question period today.

The Speaker: If it is not out of question period, I will wait until tomorrow to hear the question from the hon. member so that we follow the procedures.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT**

The House resumed from October 4 consideration of the motion that Bill C-44, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Angela Vautour (Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, PC): Mr. Speaker, this is certainly a very important issue for not only me but certainly for the people of my riding of Beauséjour—Petitcodiac and all of Atlantic Canada. More than that, this is not only an Atlantic Canada issue—

Mr. Reed Elley: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe we are still speaking to Bill C-45, is that not correct?

Some hon. members: No.

• (1515)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The government, as is its right, had the House move to Bill C-44. We are now in rotation on Bill C-44.

Mr. Lee Morrison: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Yesterday a member had just finished his remarks when we finished with Bill C-44 and we did not get a chance to ask any questions. I wonder if we could do that now before going to another speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The Speaker, in rising to ask for debate on Bill C-44, asked for questions and comments of the last speaker. If the member who was on his feet for questions and comments were here, I am sure we could put forward an appropriate motion to see whether the House would agree to revert to questions and comments and then go forward.

[Translation]

Ms. Angela Vautour (Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, PC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a very serious issue that is a concern for many people, not only in my riding, Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, but also right across the Atlantic region and the country.

Workers who depend on seasonal industry are found not only in the riding of Beauséjour-Petitcodiac but anywhere in Canada where the main industry is seasonal.

In 1996, the Liberal government decided to make changes to employment insurance plan, while knowing that HRDC had a document showing that, just as an example, 75% of seasonal workers in New Brunswick lived on less than \$10,000 a year. Still, the government attacked these workers, even though they had been

saying day in and day out that they opposed the changes. When I led the coalition against the cuts to employment insurance in New Brunswick, we told the government what impacts the cuts would have.

I came to meet with the former human resources development minister and present her with a petition containing 17,000 names. These people were saying that the cuts were going to hurt them badly, that they represented discrimination against seasonal workers and were therefore unacceptable, and that the poorest of the poor would be the ones paying for the deficit.

But the Prime Minister, who came to get elected in the riding of Beauséjour, turned around and said “I visited the area and people there are all drunk in taverns, while collecting UI benefits”. The people of Beauséjour—Petitcodiac responded to that comment on June 2, 1997.

People from my area have had enough of being laughed at, denigrated and called lazy. The Prime Minister of Canada said it and the Canadian Alliance said it again just now, everyone in the Atlantic provinces is lazy and does not want to work.

• (1520)

I have one thing to say to the members of the Liberal Party and the Canadian Alliance: people from my area are hardworking, they are educated and they work very hard. When there is work, they work. They have no problem with working, except that work in our area is seasonal. Nobody wakes up in the morning saying “I want to be a seasonal worker”. It is the nature of the industry to be seasonal.

Canada must understand that, Ontario must understand that, Alberta must understand that, the government must understand that. The members of the Canadian Alliance must absolutely understand that people in my area are not lazy.

I myself worked in the seasonal industry, and I can assure the House that nobody can call me lazy, far from it. I am tired of hearing this sort of thing. I am tired of hearing that the people in my community are all lazy.

Who are known as hardworking people in western Canada? Who are considered relentless workers, people who work seven days a week? The people from Atlantic Canada who have to leave their communities to find work. Our young university graduates who have to leave their communities and their families to go and work in western Canada.

That is not what Canada is about. That is not what our party wants. Our priority is to ensure that everybody has equal opportunity to be gainfully employed all year round. As people in my region

Government Orders

would say “We would easily trade our EI benefits for a full time job. Any time. No problem”.

[English]

The problem is, we have a government that is attacking the worker instead of the problem, and that is not right.

A couple of weeks before a federal election and the Prime Minister comes in and says “Oops”. The Minister of HRDC said herself that it was a punitive measure. Ça punissait les travailleurs. If it does punish the workers why did it take the Liberals four years—two weeks before an election call—to say that they made a mistake? Can they fix all the problems they have caused in those communities over the last four years? How many family break-ups have there been? How many kids have been forced into the school breakfast program because their parents can no longer feed them because of the cuts to EI? How many parents have been forced to go to food banks because of the cuts to EI?

Can anyone imagine being a single parent making \$10,000 a year and having the Liberal government take part of that money away? According to a member of the reform alliance party, \$10,000 is a comfortable salary. I would like to see that member try to live on \$10,000 a year. I think she would change her mind. Perhaps what she needs is to end up living on \$10,000 a year. Then she would understand what it means.

The Alliance members are saying that they are going to govern this country. I doubt it. I doubt very much if Canadians will accept the kinds of comments made in the House by the reform alliance members.

Mr. Peter MacKay: Lazy maritimers, they called them.

Ms. Angela Vautour: Yes, lazy maritimers.

A report was released last week stating that 40% more children are living in poverty today than we had 10 years ago. It keeps increasing on a daily basis. The Liberals are wondering why we have more poor children. If the parents are poor the children are poor. That is how it works.

I have eight food banks in my riding and I have 82,000 people living in the riding. Every one of those eight food banks told me last week that they have seen an increase in people using the food banks directly because of the cuts to EI. They are not saying maybe. They are saying directly. Who made the cuts?

I collected EI when the Progressive Conservative Party was in power. I was able to feed my son and myself and pay my rent with that EI cheque. We cannot do that any more with this Liberal Party in power. We need to change. Not only do we need to change the EI program, we need to change the government. We need to sit on that side and fix what the Liberals have broken, which is exactly what we intend to do after the next federal election.

• (1525)

Mr. Lee Morrison (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting that members of that party do not seem to be clear on the concept of who is against who in the House.

The government is over there but during her speech she spent a great deal of time attacking, of all people, the reform conservative alliance. This is a bill on which all opposition members should be united in opposition to the government.

Does the member really think it is more fun to bite the ankles of the Alliance and lick the hands of the government than it is to act as a member of parliament in opposition?

Ms. Angela Vautour: Mr. Speaker, the member should not make statements about seasonal workers having a comfortable annual income and that they do not need any help. On top of that, the government is going to cut all regional development for the same regions that need development to solve the problem.

The employment insurance program is not the problem in our rural communities. The problem is that we do not have jobs. The party that the member represents is saying that it does not agree with regional development. I have no problem saying that the Liberal government has made mistakes and has caused a lot of hardship, but I can also say that the Reform Party would do the same, if not worse.

Mrs. Michelle Dockrill (Bras d’Or—Cape Breton, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on a number of occasions we have sat here listening to members of the opposition talk about what the government is doing wrong and especially how it has affected those of us in Atlantic Canada.

One of the hardships that has been caused with respect to what the government has done to EI is the government’s clear ability to take the money off the backs of Canadian workers and apply it to the debt. This has caused tremendous hardship in my part of the country. There is a little piece of reality in this.

The process of taking money off the backs of Canadian workers and the unemployed and applying it to the debt was started by the Progressive Conservative Party. That is how the Liberal government was able to get away with it. I would like the member to comment on her party’s role in what the Liberal government has done to Atlantic Canadians and seasonal workers.

Ms. Angela Vautour: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that the member might have her facts a bit wrong.

I was a seasonal worker at the time the PC Party was in power and I was able to feed my kids. When the PC Party was in power there was a \$6 billion deficit in the UI fund. Today there is a \$30 billion surplus. We cannot look at the difference. I never had a problem feeding my son when I was on UI. There was enough money available for me to do it.

Government Orders

With the Liberal Party in power, single parents do not have enough income to feed their kids or provide them with shelter.

The member should put her politics aside and look at who the culprits are here. The culprits are the Liberals. The PC government did not have a \$30 billion surplus. We had a \$6 billion deficit. That was the reality.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I noticed that the speaker from the PC Party and the speaker who preceded her were somewhat indignant over a remark that I was purported to have made, that all seasonal workers earn comfortable incomes. I want to take this opportunity to set the record straight.

What I talked about were seasonal workers who earn comfortable incomes being given additional moneys by the government. The comfortable income is the nearly \$50,000 that seasonal workers will now be able to earn before any of the EI is clawed back.

This member and the member who spoke before made the ridiculous assumption that I would consider \$10,000 to be a reasonable income.

• (1530)

Obviously, that was a clear misinterpretation and distortion of what I said. I would like to set the record straight. I would like to ask the hon. member whether she believes that seasonal workers who earn nearly \$50,000 should have no clawback on their EI.

Ms. Angela Vautour: Mr. Speaker, I am just going to quote her words from the French *Hansard*.

[*Translation*]

She said “Now that he is about to call an election, the Prime Minister has decided to increase EI payments to seasonal workers who already earn a very comfortable annual income”.

[*English*]

What I am saying is I would rather concentrate on the majority of seasonal workers, like I see in New Brunswick, who are living on less than \$10,000 a year. The member would rather look at the small percentage of some seasonal workers somewhere in Canada. I do not know where she is finding them but she is saying there are some. I know that in *Hansard* she specified a comfortable annual income in Atlantic Canada.

She would rather concentrate on that small percentage—

An hon. member: Regional prejudice.

Ms. Angela Vautour: That is regional prejudice. She is dividing them. She should be concentrating on the majority of seasonal workers who are in trouble today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The time provided for questions and comments has expired, but I already indicated to the hon. member for Matapédia—Matane that he could ask a short question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Canuel (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I hope you will show some tolerance because I have a brief comment to make and a brief question to ask.

My comment is that the government opposite is heartless. I said before that the Prime Minister was a son of darkness and I am still saying that.

Here is my question. Does the hon. member think it is reasonable to require 910 hours for young people? Personally, I think it is inhuman and totally unrealistic. I would like my colleague to comment on that.

Ms. Angela Vautour: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. It is certainly impossible for our young people to work 910 hours. That is the problem. Our young people end up leaving our communities. Instead of coming back to contribute to the economy of our region after finishing their postsecondary education, they have to leave. It is a problem and I agree with the hon. member on that.

[*English*]

Mr. Lee Morrison (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, before I begin I would like to indicate that I will be dividing my time.

Bill C-44, commonly known as the Liberal vote enhancement bill, has been touted as an initiative to make life easier for low income workers or needy EI recipients. However its promise, like most Liberal promises, is fraudulent. On the eve of an election, the government, with a lot of huffing and puffing, proposes to tinker with a system which desperately needs a complete overhaul.

A few decades ago we had a UI system that worked. It was based on true insurance principles. Over the years its original function as an employer-employee funded program to provide temporary income in the event of unexpected job loss has been perverted, complicated and made grossly unfair by mostly Liberal governments. The result is a mishmash of ill-conceived social programs, excessively high premiums and a massive surplus which is largely inaccessible to those most in need of benefits.

It long ago ceased to be an insurance program by any definition. Instead, it has become a political cash cow for the government. The government is now collecting about \$10 billion per year more in premiums than it pays out in benefits. The piddling changes proposed in the bill will decrease that overcharge by about 12% but most of the rip-off will continue. I would dare say that if a legitimate insurance company tried to operate in that fashion charges would be laid.

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The surplus is not even protected in a separate fund for high unemployment emergencies. Excess collections are bled into general revenue and may be used to pay for any goofy scheme that the government comes up with.

• (1535)

To refer to the money collected as insurance premiums is, as I said, fraudulent. It is a payroll tax, nothing more, nothing less. Think how much more economically beneficial it would be if the government desisted from ripping off workers and employers and left that \$10 billion a year in their pockets. Employers would be able to have money to hire more people on their actual payroll—job creation—and workers would have more money to spend on goods and services, thus creating even more jobs. It would be a win-win situation even for the government.

There is no consistency in the system, nor will there be with the proposed changes. On one hand, even well paid seasonal workers, fallers, heavy equipment operators and people like that will be able to draw EI benefits with the clawback threshold now raised to \$48,750.

A few yappers on both sides of the House have attacked the member for Calgary—Nose Hill for describing some part time workers as earning a comfortable living. I would say that anybody earning \$48,000 a year is earning a comfortable living, and there are millions of Canadian workers, most of them employed full time, who would dearly love to have incomes of more than \$48,750.

On the other hand, we MPs regularly receive complaints from low income people who have been denied benefits, in spite of having contributed to the system for many years but who are unable to surmount the obstacles placed in front of them by an inflexible and obdurate bureaucracy. To qualify for EI people need more hours of work if they have never made a claim than if they have been in and out of the workforce like a fiddler's elbow.

I have documented cases of workers who worked 500 to 600 hours in the previous year, who had premiums extorted from them under false pretences for many, many years and who found themselves ineligible for benefits or training because they had never previously touched the system. They needed a minimum of 910 hours before they could take their first bite of pogy. They are penalized for their own self-sufficiency. That is perverse and it is cruel.

In a sane system operating under the same principles as other types of insurance, individuals with clean claims records would be given favourable treatment, but under Liberal EI they are penalized.

Letters which I received from successive HRD ministers regarding this anomaly have been mostly regurgitations of EI regulations which I and my staff are quite capable of extracting from departmental bumph. We get the stock bureaucratic slop such as, "please be assured that I will continue to closely monitor the situation" or "multiple job holders and part time workers have all of their hours of work insured". Like hell they do.

When I informed the previous minister of a worker who after 20 years in the labour force was unable to access an upgrading program, his reply said in part:

The rationale behind this entry requirement for new entrants and re-entrants was to discourage a cycle of reliance on Employment Insurance by ensuring that workers, especially young people, establish a significant attachment to the labour force before collecting Employment Insurance benefits. The intent was also to strengthen the relationship between work effort and entitlement to benefits by requesting claimants to have a reasonable labour force attachment before collecting benefits.

That was his rationale for denying benefits to a middle-aged man who had worked and paid his premiums for 20 years. What an insult, not only to my constituent, but to me.

• (1540)

One of the problems is that very few people in the cabinet over there have ever had any real world work experience. They think sweat is something that they get in the racketball court. They have never had to worry about when to make a rental payment. They have certainly never had to worry about accessing UI. It is the elite rule and we are paying a price for that. Canadian workers pay a price for that.

Another constituent was laid off after working full time for 10 years. She innocently accepted part time work for more than a year rather than apply for EI. When she lost the part time job as well, her efforts to remain independent had cost her any chance of benefits because of the 910 hour rule.

This mess that has been created in EI, largely through the efforts of the people sitting on the other side of the aisle, has to be addressed as a whole, not with this little bit of piecemeal "tinker here, fix there and fiddle there". This will not repair the system.

I hope that people on the other side, maybe from self-interest, would try to fix it because if what is going on now goes to its culmination, and we have an election soon, there may be a lot of folks over there who would like to be able to access the EI system. They would not be able to because of the 910 rule. They are stuck.

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for his eloquent and pointed comments on this bill. For many years we have been trying to reform the EI system which has been a cash cow system for the government and in effect a tax on the people.

My hon. colleague has fought for many years to improve the situation for many of his people, particularly those who are most

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impoverished. What does he suggest be done to make the EI system more effective to enable those people who cannot help themselves to get back into the workforce for a longer period of time?

Mr. Lee Morrison: Mr. Speaker, there are two things. First, bring the premiums into line with the need so that they are not building up this huge surplus which, as I said, if it was out there in the general economy would help to create jobs in some small way and therefore decrease the need for EI.

Second, do away with the convoluted rules which now exist and which are becoming more convoluted by the day, certainly with the new amendments to the act. We need to simplify regulations so that people who have religiously paid into the system for years will be eligible to tap into the funds if they do have sudden and expected unemployment.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to use the few minutes available to me under questions and comments to ask the previous speaker why his party has such a narrow-minded attitude towards seasonal workers, who are in particular economic situations.

These people work in industries where full time jobs are not necessarily available. I think these kinds of jobs exist across Canada.

• (1545)

We are talking about people who work in the forestry, tourism, agricultural and fishing industries. The members opposite seem to believe that many of these workers are already earning a lot of money and would get even richer with the elimination of the intensity rule and the changes to the clawback provisions. But this is not the case. Seasonal workers, at least most of them in my region, often earn \$20,000, \$25,000 or \$30,000 a year when they have the opportunity to work for several months in a row. Quite often, they have to make do with the minimum wage.

Would it not be possible for the member to urge the other members of his party to reconsider their position on this issue? We are not asking them to approve the government; that is something we have not done ourselves. We believe that the current bill does not go nearly far enough to reinstate a fair EI program.

Would it not be possible for members of the Canadian Alliance to reconsider their position in order to treat these workers more fairly? A good way for them to do so would be to go into the field and see how these people really live so that we can put a stop to all the misconceptions that the government has been circulating for so many years.

[English]

Mr. Lee Morrison: Mr. Speaker, I was a seasonal worker in mineral exploration for many years so I do know a little about the subject. It was by choice. I could have taken a nine to five job year round, but I made good money like a lot of seasonal workers do. I simply did not have to work the full year. Not every seasonal worker earns minimum wage.

If the hon. member had been listening to my reply to the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, he would have heard me say that one of the solutions which we as a party would propose for the problems with EI would be to do away with all the convoluted rules which have developed over the years for tapping into it. He was not listening.

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to Bill C-44. I hope to dispel some of the myths around the issue.

For a long time the EI system has been in disarray. Rather than helping or improving the situation of those who are unemployed, it has actually retarded their ability to get a job. That might seem on first blush to be counterintuitive but we will go through it and describe how the government's support of the current EI system has prevented Canadians from gaining long term employment.

The government had an enormous opportunity with Bill C-44 to truly reform the EI system to help those who cannot find a job and to help with income support during periods when people are unemployed through no fault of their own. Unfortunately it is actually damaging their ability to gain long term employment.

The bill increases the minimum amount which a person can earn before receiving a clawback of the EI money from \$39,000 to over \$48,000. Prior to earning \$48,000 a person can receive EI payments and there would be no clawback whatsoever. A clawback would be a maximum of 30% of moneys over that.

Why would someone making \$60,000 or \$70,000 a year be receiving EI payments from the government? There are enough poor people in Canada today. In fact over four million people in Canada are labelled as having some degree of poverty. Why is it that with the limited amount of money we have, people who make a fairly high amount of money have access to EI?

We would like to make EI a true insurance. The limited amount of moneys should actually go not only to help people who are unemployed through no fault of their own but also to give them the skills and training they need to be employed for a long period of time. That is what should be done rather than catering to the lowest common denominator of people who go through the cycle of working a minimum number of hours and then receiving EI payments.

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• (1550)

It is a form of institutionalized welfare that we are pandering to with the current system. We should not allow that to happen. It is not fair for the employers who pay into the EI fund. It is not fair for the unemployed people who need the money.

Interestingly enough the high level of premiums that the government supports and which employers have to pay is retarding the individual's ability to work. The artificially high premiums which provide over \$10 billion a year for the government purse are actually a tax. It is money that has been taken away from the private sector and put into the government's hands to redistribute as it sees fit.

In effect those moneys are pulled away. That money is taken out of the private sector from employers who could have used it for skills training, to enhance their business, to become more competitive and to have lower taxes so that they could expand their business and hire more people.

The high EI premiums are a tax on the private sector. They have impeded the ability of the private sector to employ people, which has caused an artificially high level of unemployment and unfortunately has contributed to our lack of competitiveness.

As my colleague from Cypress Hills—Grasslands mentioned, we have asked to put the EI system on true insurance principles. Let us bring down substantially the payments the private sector makes so that companies have more money in their pockets to hire people. People would not be taken off the rolls serially. People would not be working as seasonal workers and would not work only 910 hours a year or 470 hours a year depending on who they are.

We do not have to cater to the lowest common denominator. We provided an excellent solution. By reducing the amount of money companies would say thank you because they could hire a number of people, put them back to work and those people would not be on the EI rolls.

It is not rocket science but it needs to be done. It is common sense. It should have been done a long time ago because, yes, it is hurting employers, but it is also hurting the employees that we profess to wish to help. The government should listen to what we are saying on this side. It would go a long way to improving the EI system.

Looking at this issue in the larger context, it goes back to the mid-1960s and the government's war on poverty. The idea was to engage in a process of handouts and a process of what it called economic redistribution. Is that really the best way to go about it?

We on this side strongly support efforts to help those who cannot help themselves. We certainly want to give people a handout while they are in need. What most people want is a hand up, not a handout. Most people on the welfare and EI rolls want to go back

to work. Why not invest some of that money in skills training? Why not give people the skills so they are not seasonal workers for chunks of their lives? I am sure they would want to work most of the year, not part of it. By doing that we would have a vigorous and competitive economy.

Unfortunately the bill is indicative of the over-arching Liberal philosophy that has poisoned the economy of our country for decades. It is an example of a move toward mediocrity. It is a move toward catering to a lower common denominator. It does not empower the individual. It empowers the government to take money from companies to redistribute as it sees fit. Why? A cynic may think that it was to buy votes. Historically that is what has happened. The government is taking money out of the pockets of individuals and doling it out in other parts of the country.

• (1555)

We have seen reports just in the last 24 hours where moneys have gone into the maritimes at the rate of 10 times what they were one year ago. People in the maritimes see through this. They are saying "Do not take us for fools. We know what you are doing. You are trying to buy us off". The people in the maritimes do not want this. They want the maritimes to be a competitive, vigorous centre, an economic tiger.

They are looking at models such as Ireland. They wish the government would show the leadership that the Irish government has demonstrated to its people. Ireland was an economic backwater for many years and the people of that country finally said they would not take it any more. What did the Irish government do? It lowered taxes. It relaxed its labour laws. It invested in education. It removed the egregious rules and regulations that were choking the private sector. Ireland is now receiving 50% of all investment that goes into the European Union. It is an economic tiger.

People in the maritimes like that vision. They are looking at leadership from the Canadian Alliance to see how they can do it. They know they are not getting leadership from the government. The government doles out money, but the people in the maritimes do not want handouts. They want an environment in which they can thrive.

The proof is in the pudding. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the Canadian Labour Congress do not approve of the bill. They are against it. The Canadian Labour Congress is against the bill because it crushes people's ability to work.

We want people to work. We want to take care of those people who cannot take care of themselves and who are unemployed through no fault of their own. It is that balance that we are championing. It is that balance that the government would be wise to listen to.

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The proof of the pudding will be in the next election. We are confident our side will win.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech. As members know, the Bloc Québécois is calling for more substantial changes in the bill introduced by the Liberals.

We all know that this whole issue concerns seasonal workers. I am a little bit surprised to see that my colleague from the Canadian Alliance is not aware of the problems that all the seasonal workers from western Canada face.

Why should we penalize the seasonal workers from eastern and western parts of Canada by adopting a policy that does not seem to meet their needs, wherever they are in Canada? I would like some explanations on this.

[*English*]

Mr. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question, but I think the larger question at hand here is why we would want to cater to enforcing seasonal work. Why do we not look to full employment with people working all year long?

Seasonal workers do not want to work part of the year. The people in my neck of the woods do not want to work part of the year. They want to work all year long. They want to make a lot more money. They do not want to be on employment insurance.

The government has taken money away from the private sector and it is inhibiting the private sector's ability to employ people all year long. That is what is going on.

We should take out the regional differences, which is what we have been saying for a long time. For political reasons this bill and its predecessor, the rules governing EI, have allowed the government to gerrymander situations and to ensure that there are regional differences. Why should there be regional differences? People should be treated equally across the country. An unemployed person on the west coast, an unemployed person in Quebec and an unemployed person in the maritimes are unemployed people and they should be treated equally.

Ms. Paddy Torsney (Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as some people will know, of course, my parents emigrated from Ireland, so I have a great number of aunts and uncles who live there.

Earlier this year I had occasion to talk to one of my uncles. He had had occasion to watch the House of Commons, since he was interested in his young niece, and he asked me to convey to members of the party opposite at the earliest possible opportunity their complete misrepresentation of what drove the economy of Ireland.

• (1600)

He is quite concerned, as I am sure most people in Ireland would be concerned, that it was not about lowering tax levels alone. It was about investing in people, about investing in post-secondary education, about the very programs that the hon. member and his party condemn every day in the House. If he had studied the full aspect of what in fact was the success in Ireland I wonder what he would say to his colleagues who get up and condemn the minister of HRDC for her initiatives to ensure that people do get a chance to get a hand up and a chance to get full employment. The reality is that he is comparing a very tiny country with a country that has great regional differences.

He is misrepresenting the fact that my province of Ontario and my workers who work in the construction industry have asked for this change. It is this caucus that has asked for changes to the current EI system.

Mr. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I hope the hon. member was not speaking disparagingly about the NDP, the Bloc or the Conservative Party. That would be a shame.

Having said that, what I said before is that in the Irish situation they did reduce taxes. They did make investments. They did relax labour laws. They did remove the rules and regulations that choked the private sector.

They did not make an investment in handouts to the private sector. The large numbers of international companies that have gone into Ireland, high tech companies such as IBM, Xerox and many others, have gone there to set up shop because the tax structure, the labour laws and the educational standards are excellent.

We have been asking for a long time that we look at those pillars of an economy that make it strong, like the lower taxes, the removal of egregious rules and regulations and the strong educational system, and ensure that the country has them.

Handouts from HRDC that go to friends of the government in power are not what they do in Ireland. That would crush the private sector and prevent people from getting employed. The hon. member just needs to look to the auditor general to know what is really going on at HRDC.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be able to talk to Bill C-44, which changes some of the rules of the employment insurance program.

As far as I am concerned, Bill C-44 on employment insurance makes very minor adjustments and can be considered an electoral goody. The Liberal government had no choice but to amend the Employment Insurance Act.

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It is but a short-sighted revision and not a comprehensive reform of the Employment Insurance Act.

It is a bill without substance and clearly inadequate for the large numbers of workers without jobs. It is a cosmetic bill, which will cost the government a mere \$500 million when all is said and done. That is not much, compared to the \$32 billion accumulated in the government's coffers. We know that this year alone \$7 billion went directly to paying down the debt.

Many of those excluded will not qualify for EI benefits. That means that two people out of three will continue to be excluded, in spite of the fact that a few major changes were made.

Before I begin my short speech on the Employment Insurance Act, I wish to inform the Chair that I would like to share my time with my colleague from Charlevoix.

Bill C-44 consists of three meagre measures. Some might find them interesting since much needed to be done with respect to the employment insurance program. Let us begin with the intensity rule.

• (1605)

That rule will not apply any more. That is good for those who were penalized because they were considered frequent claimants. They will no longer have to lose 1% on their salary. There will no longer be any penalty. The unemployed will no longer have benefits reduced to 50% or 55% of their salary. It is a step in the right direction, but it is too little.

The maximum insurable earning threshold will be raised from \$39,000 to \$48,000 for the purpose of the clawback on EI benefits. The government is giving a little break to those who earn up to \$48,000.

For a new parent who leaves the work force, it will be possible to go back four years, instead of one year, to calculate the number of eligible hours for employment insurance.

I repeat that this is a step in the right direction, but Bill C-44 does not respond to many inequities facing several workers. First, young people will still have to work 910 hours to qualify. We know very well that it is difficult for a young person to accumulate 910 hours. The work force no longer provides stable jobs. Instead, it provides insecure and part time jobs. Consequently, it is too much to require 910 hours for a young person to qualify.

The whole issue of independent workers has not been dealt with. We know that, in Quebec, they represent 16% of the population. In this bill, the issue of independent workers is not being dealt with.

The Bloc Québécois had made several proposals for refunding premiums for people who earn up to \$5,000. We know that, today, a person who earns \$2,000 pays premiums, but that above that

amount, premiums are never refunded. We would have liked that cap set at \$5,000. Students work in the summer, pay employment insurance premiums and do not get a refund of premiums paid on income over \$2,000.

There are special benefits that include maternal benefits. Again, there will be some irritants for pregnant women. They will have to work 600 hours, contrary to workers in some regions who will receive benefits after working for 420 hours. This is a double standard. If we want to encourage women to have children, they will not find adequate measures to deal with their situation.

We are well aware that the government's proposal to double the maternity leave is clearly inadequate. We know that many women do not use the maternity leave—I think the ratio is about 52%—because they cannot afford to stay home for any length of time with benefits that represent only 55% of their salary.

Very often, women who do stay home with their children do not use the whole maternity leave. It does not make sense to give a one year maternity leave to women who cannot afford it, who cannot afford to stay away from work for a year.

The government did not seriously address the Employment Insurance Act and all its ramifications. It did not address the status of seasonal workers either. In Baie-Comeau, Trois-Pistoles or Rouyn-Noranda, there are inequities in the treatment of seasonal workers. The government has not dealt with their problem. Discrimination will continue. The proposed measures are meagre compared to the huge surplus piling up in the EI fund.

The Prime Minister is quite pleased with the accumulated surplus. As he said so clearly in the House "Let me enjoy this, if it is the only problem I have". He thinks this is a minor problem. When workers are excluded from the EI benefits, or have their meagre benefits reduced under the intensity rule, the Prime Minister is not, as we know, the one who is faced with the problem of being jobless.

• (1610)

Also, the government has not really dealt with reduced benefits for seasonal workers. This category of workers is only entitled to reduced benefits. For instance, the government refused to increase the benefits to 60% of the wages of the workers to take the increase in the cost of living into account. It could have indexed EI benefits.

The EI program has been and continues to be totally out of touch with reality, even if the government wants us to believe that the program is in sync with the labour market. It is not; it is totally out of whack.

The figures speak for themselves. When the reform was implemented in 1997, there was a decrease of 16.4% in the number of EI claimants, compared to a 4% drop in the unemployment rate. It was the same for several years. But those figures only apply for 1997. Between 1993 and 1999, the number of regular claimants

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decreased by 52.4% and the unemployment rate was at 28%. As members can see, the number of claimants dropped twice as much as the number of the unemployed. In percentage, the number of unemployed workers is decreasing more slowly than the number of claimants.

That is why we believe that this reform is far from suited to the realities of the labour market. We can say it is a small victory, a half-victory for the Bloc Québécois, as the numerous demands made by my party for a comprehensive reform of the new employment insurance legislation have led to three small measures taken by the government in Bill C-44. This will bring some comfort to certain workers who have lost their jobs. However, a lot of people have been forgotten, including women, young people and seasonal workers. The government should have made other changes to allow more people to qualify.

The premium rate was reduced; it is all fine and well to lower it to \$2.25, but if the majority of unemployed people are not covered, I think we are missing what the main purpose of such legislation should be, that is, helping those who find themselves without a job.

In closing, I would like to repeat a word used by the person who was responsible for this issue before, who said he was “shocked” when I was putting questions to him and telling him that this reform would be devastating for thousands and thousands of unemployed people. We certainly cannot give the government high marks for these three very small measures.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I am going to respond briefly to the comments of the Bloc Québécois member.

I find the tone of her comments very surprising. She is a little condescending, I must say with her remarks about these three very small measures. To say these three very small measures is misleading to start with; there are more than three measures, regardless of their size. It should also be pointed out that the Bloc Québécois does not seem to be united in its response to Bill C-44, since the Bloc Québécois member who just spoke has described, in detail, all the aspects she thought were particularly negative.

• (1615)

But on September 18 in Chicoutimi, her boss, the Bloc Québécois house leader, said—and unfortunately I do not have the text before me, so I will have to rely on my memory—that he welcomed this bill, because it would create jobs for seasonal workers and women. So I would ask the hon. member across the way to start singing from the same song sheet as the other members of her party.

As for women and young people, let us not forget that women in particular will be affected by this new legislation, because in most cases they are the ones who stay at home. They are the ones who

will be able to continue to receive 80% of their salary from the time they stay home with their children. So I do not think that there is really anything to criticize about this bill as far as women are concerned.

As for young people, let us remember the context in which the bill was drafted. It is part of a large number of measures being proposed by the Department of Human Resources Development, that is, that—

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold: Is there a question?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: It is a comment, and I think I am allowed a comment.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I apologize. I remembered the name of the member, but I was struggling for the circumscription.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for commenting on my remarks. We will see how these measures are applied. The people will pass judgment on the reform of employment insurance as compared to the old unemployment insurance legislation.

We have seen how frustrated people are and we will see that sectors have been forgotten in this reform. The government should have made an in-depth reform, for example, with an examination of the real problem of seasonal work.

I can say that time has proven us right. We forced the government to make changes and we were the mobilizing force with respect to the impact of the measures contained in the Employment Insurance Act.

I am not saying that we are not happy with the measures proposed, but I think they do not go far enough with regard to the scope of the problem of lost jobs and the people who will continue to be denied employment insurance.

Mention should be made—and the member opposite did not refer to this—of the size of the surplus the government took from the employment insurance fund. The contributors to it are the workers and the employers and not the government. All of this money that went to reduce the deficit disappeared into the government’s consolidated fund.

The government will accumulate more surplus, perhaps to a lesser degree, but it could perhaps have been a lot more generous to those who are without a job and receiving a mere 50% or 55% of their salary and who have to work a certain number of hours before they are entitled to benefits.

We will be following this matter closely, and, despite the member’s enthusiasm, I am sure that the public will support us

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once more. The Bloc Québécois has been here since 1993, and we have done studies on the impact of the Employment Insurance Act, and the people sided with us.

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-44, not so much on account of its content, but to speak up for seasonal workers in the Charlevoix riding, as well as those in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, lower St. Lawrence and north shore regions.

• (1620)

The bill before us today is mere window dressing. On the eve of an election, the government introduced a bill it wants to push through the House in an attempt to save a few seats and deal with problems in the regions.

Since the employment insurance reform in 1996, the minister has been mandated by the government, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance to squeeze \$5 billion a year out of the EI fund.

How does the Department of Human Resources Development manage to collect a yearly surplus of \$5 billion? It is a hidden tax on employment, collected mainly on the backs of seasonal workers.

The current minister and her predecessors have always acquiesced to the request, producing \$5 billion a year to be put toward reducing the deficit.

Last week the Bloc Québécois asked the Prime Minister whether the bill the minister was going to introduce in the House would provide more money for workers and remove the criteria which have penalized seasonal workers year after year? The Prime Minister's answer went somewhat like this: The government has wiped out the deficit and there is a \$31.2 billion surplus in the EI fund. The government intends to remove the rules that had been introduced to reduce benefits by 1% every year for five years.

Since 1996, the Bloc Québécois has been decrying the EI reform in the House. Thousands upon thousands of petitions have been tabled. Thousands and thousands of them, mayors, aboriginal communities, regional municipalities—in short, all manner of socio-economic stakeholders—have expressed their disagreement so far.

This summer, a problem was experienced in Charlevoix and the north shore, the result of zone redistribution. The reform includes a draft regulation permitting the minister to readjust his or her employment insurance zones every five years.

There was a problem in the Gaspé. There was much sympathy for the Gaspé because of the plant and mine closures. There was also a problem with the seasonal workers in the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands.

At that time, the minister was really attentive to the people of the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands. She decided to create a special

zone to include the Gaspé, of course, the Magdalen Islands and the riding of Matapédia—Matane, the riding of my colleague.

When the minister said that she had consulted with MPs on this infamous geographical redistribution, the member for côte nord and the member for Charlevoix were never consulted. At the last minute, the minister noticed that the zone was far too small, so she decided to add the lower north shore to it. This had a devastating effect on the unemployment rate in Charlevoix and on the north shore.

Having created this zone, she ought to have created a pilot project for the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands. This way, once the economic situation improved and employability gradually got better, the pilot project would have ended. But no, that is not what she did. She gave something to the workers in the Gaspé, at the expense of those in the north shore and Charlevoix regions.

Because she needed an additional \$5 million, \$6 million or \$10 million to pay for the 420 worked hours for 32 weeks of benefits, the minister offloaded the problem squarely onto the other side of the river. As a result, the Charlevoix region is now in the same situation as the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands, the lower north shore having been removed from our zone.

Charlevoix, the north shore, the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, the Lower St. Lawrence and the Montmagny—L'Islet regions ended up in a single zone.

• (1625)

What we are asking and what the petitioners are asking is for the government to leave us in the zone in which we were, in northern Quebec, or at least to include us under the new rezoning in Quebec's northwest region.

All this commotion since July 9 has resulted in people mobilizing and organizing protests, and coalitions have sprung up. We have consulted with the municipalities and people have made representations.

Following that, the minister came to propose transitional measures. Under these transitional measures, after July 9, the new requirements would be 525 hours of work for 21 weeks of benefits. This is unacceptable. It is unacceptable to the people of Charlevoix.

Between July 9 and September 17, the people who have worked 525 hours will be entitled to 21 weeks of benefits during the winter. Then the revenue minister came to Charlevoix to tell us that the minister had come up with transitional measures to help seasonal workers, and these measures were to come into effect on September 17. They had come up with a transitional measure, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure that you would agree with me and that the revenue minister could stand up and confirm what I have just said.

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With all the pressure we exerted, the protests, the demonstrations, the coalitions and the meetings with the minister, we were able to sway the government. A Liberal member would not have been so lucky, because the minister would have told him "Be quiet, do not embarrass me, do not bother me with your problems".

The problem was solved thanks to the insight of the people of Charlevoix and the north shore. If you ever come to the north shore, you will see that as friendly as the people are over there, they are also real fighters. In 2000 and 2001, workers will need 420 working hours to get 32 weeks of benefits. In 2001, the minister comes back with 420 working hours for 28 weeks of benefits. In 2002-03, it will be 450 working hours for 24 weeks of benefits, and in 2003-04, 525 working hours for 21 weeks of benefits.

The minister told us we will have to get used to it. Used to what? To living on welfare?

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold: To tightening our belts.

Mr. Gérard Asselin: Is it, as the hon. member for Jonquière put it, to get used to tightening our belts and getting poorer and poorer?

People who work 15 weeks a year cannot contribute to RRSPs at the end of the year to save on income tax.

The minister said people would have to get used to working for longer periods. I checked. In the tourism industry, is it possible to make the seasons last longer? I went to the massif near Petite-Rivière-Saint-François. Is it possible to ski between June 24 and September 15? Apparently not. It would appear that the skiing season ends on April 1.

I checked to see if it was possible to extend the fishing season. It would appear that it is impossible, at 30 degrees below zero, to go out for lobster, crab or groundfish on the St. Lawrence.

I also looked at the forestry industry. Is it possible to cut timber in the winter in four feet of snow? It would appear that it is impossible to travel in the forest with machines. If workers use snowshoes to get there and cut down the trees in four feet of snow, in the spring the stumps will be four feet high. It does not make sense. There would be too much waste.

I also looked at peat bogs. Would it be possible to install a dome over peat bogs to warm up the atmosphere to make the season last longer for these workers? Again, that does not appear to be logical.

All that to say that the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of this bill because, even though it is cosmetic and has a definite pre-election flavour to it, it is a step in the right direction.

• (1630)

These are some of things that the Bloc Québécois has been asking for in the House of Commons since the 1996 reform, and we

hope the government, after the election, will continue to listen to us and grant special status to seasonal workers in Charlevoix, north shore, lower St. Lawrence and Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean.

Mr. Stéphan Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a few comments and a question for the hon. member.

When the idea for this reform came up last June, there was a so-called consultation. I referred to HRDC officials in my riding, who suggested to the minister that she maintain the status quo, since the economic indicators showed that was the best course.

At the time this reform just mentioned by the hon. member was introduced in my riding, the minimum number of hours had jumped from 420 to 490, which is absolutely shocking. Our first questions were these. What will be the impact? What percentage of workers will be affected? What will be the shortfall economically? It seems to me that these were perfectly reasonable figures to want to know.

I therefore invited the HRDC economist to come and share his figures with us. To my great surprise, it was the chief actuary who came all the way from Ottawa to meet with groups in my riding interested in the issue. He ended up telling us he did not have these figures.

Does this mean that the government has produced a reform without knowing the economic impact on families, without knowing how many people were going to be without benefits in the month of February? I am speaking today on behalf of these families. This is ridiculous.

What is more, this complete sham of a bill has the potential to restore balance and a certain justice, but instead of that, what we have is window dressing. I admit that the bill is headed in the right direction, such as with the idea of eliminating the intensity rule. As for the rest, however, it is wrong to think that this is progress. What it is is, electioneering, which is completely unacceptable.

Does the member think it right that the chief actuary, who is supposed to know the figures, who is preparing a reform, does not know the figures, the impact, the percentage of workers who will be affected and the economic shortfall for the region?

Mr. Gérard Asselin: Mr. Speaker, in response to my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, a big meeting was held at Baie-Comeau, and all the senior people from Human Resources Development Canada were brought in. The departmental official who made the recommendation to the minister never took the human aspect into consideration. He had allocated so many millions to compensate the Gaspé that he had to get them back from the north shore and in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean.

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The departmental official told us that in Sept-Îles, Baie-Comeau, Mont-Joli, Rimouski or Rivière-du-Loup, there is a very low rate of unemployment. The problem, as in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, is not in the major centres. Between Baie-Comeau and Quebec City, there is the upper north shore and Charlevoix, where there is a lot of seasonal employment. I would say that 70% of people employed in tourism cannot qualify for employment insurance, along with people new to the work force, and many seasonal workers just barely qualify.

An extremely negative reaction was forthcoming from the Human Resources Development Canada offices in Sept-Îles, Quebec City and Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. The three or four directors of these centres, including the one in the lower St. Lawrence, expressed total disagreement with this regulation, recommending the status quo instead.

The problem, as I have said, is that instead of having a pilot project to temporarily solve the problems in the Gaspé, the departmental officials turned everything upside down in their reform. From a desk here in Ottawa, it is hard to see what is going on in the regions. A person has to be an MP to know what is going on there.

• (1635)

Mr. Gordon Earle (Halifax West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Bras d'Or—Cape Breton.

[*English*]

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-44, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act.

The bill does a number of things. It extends the period for the application of certain provisions of the Employment Insurance Act. It changes the method of calculating the maximum yearly insurable earnings. It exempts persons who receive certain special benefits from being considered as new entrants or re-entrants to the labour force. It removes the reduction of the rate of weekly benefits. It changes the premium rate applicable to insurable earnings. It reduces the number of cases in which benefits have to be repaid and it makes various other consequential amendments.

While I rise to indicate that the NDP supports the bill, the word support almost gets caught in my throat, because we do have some grave reservations around the legislation and what it attempts to do.

While it does take a step toward addressing the critical conditions of Canadian workers, especially those who are working in seasonal industries such as forestry, fishing, tourism, transportation, the auto industry, construction and various other trades, it does not go far enough, and I emphasize this, for the many workers who need help but cannot get any because some provisions of the

Employment Insurance Act make them ineligible for EI benefits. While it is a step in the right direction, we feel a lot more has to be done.

The changes that are spelled out in the bill are changes that are important for people living in the Atlantic provinces. I should state right at the outset that people in the Atlantic provinces are not lazy, as the Canadian Alliance would like the public to believe. We are not lazy. We are not unwilling to go where the jobs are. We are not indifferent to the opportunities available to us.

In the Atlantic provinces we are very industrious. People in the Atlantic provinces are hardworking. They are more than willing to go to where the jobs are if the opportunities do not exist in the Atlantic provinces. Unfortunately over the years, because of the treatment of the Atlantic provinces by the Conservative and Liberal regimes, we have not had the opportunities to succeed on our home turf in the same manner that others have had.

However, I am pleased to say that I have travelled to many parts of Canada. Everywhere I go I always run into Nova Scotians, Newfoundlanders and New Brunswickers, people who have gone to where the jobs are because they are determined to care for and look after their families, so much so that they will pull up roots from the Atlantic provinces and move elsewhere to provide a living for their families.

We will dispel the myth being put out there by the Alliance. It indicates that people in Atlantic Canada are looking to the Alliance for guidance and support. That is far from the truth.

To turn to the government, the reason we have concerns about the bill is that we feel the government has not had the desire to make any real substantive changes. It is quite interesting to note that the changes being made are coming on the eve of an election.

The government has not learned yet that people in Atlantic Canada are not naive enough to accept handouts at the time of an election. While it is important to make changes, and these changes are important, let us not delude ourselves as to the timing. The government has had seven years during which it could have paid some very serious attention to unemployment in the Atlantic provinces and to making the situation much better for people who are unemployed.

While there are changes in the legislation that will have a positive effect on the lives of those who are unemployed, we still feel that major changes are required if one is to deal adequately with the problem of unemployment.

It is important when we are talking about unemployment not to treat unemployment after the fact, not to be coming in when there is a problem and saying that we will fix this and patch it up by doing this, this and this. There is an important connection between unemployment and the attitude that we in society take to prevent-

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ing unemployment. We should adopt a preventive approach. There is a connection.

In that regard we should be looking at the kinds of training we are providing and the kinds of jobs we are putting forward for our youth. It is very important to invest in the young people of our country in a meaningful way. Yet look at what is happening to a lot of our young people. They are attending university and struggling to obtain an education so that they can become productive members of society, and they find themselves faced with huge tuition fees.

• (1640)

In Nova Scotia I believe we pay the highest tuition fees per capita in the country. Yet we expect our young people to be able to eke out a living for themselves under those conditions. What happens is that they come out of university with high debt loads before they even have an opportunity to have a job. In terms of student debt, they owe anywhere from \$25,000 and up. That is one measure the government should be looking at very closely if it is concerned about this cycle of unemployment and this cycle of dependency that comes from unemployment.

We should also be investing in our women, in looking at the kinds of opportunities that should be made available to our women. Regardless of what people may say about how far we have come in terms of gender equality, it is still pretty much a man's world out there when we look at business, industry and various professions. I had the opportunity not too long ago to speak to the Canadian Society of Civil Engineering. The first thing that struck me when I looked around the room was that there was a whole roomful of men with one or two women in that profession.

Yet we know that when it comes to designing infrastructure and looking at what is important for our society, women, who constitute at least 50% of our society, have a very important role to play. Quite often they bring a much different perspective to what the needs are than men do. We must have that balance in our approach.

The government should be looking at the kinds of things that support women in the jobs they are doing, in the professions they are seeking. We had a good example of how that was not done until the government was forced to the wall when we look at the pay equity issue and how hard we had to fight to have it dealt with by the government. All of this ties in with the question of unemployment.

We can look at investing in our minority groups and in the aboriginal people of our country. When we look at the conditions on reserves and in the aboriginal communities we see that the poverty rate is much higher than elsewhere, as are the death rate, the incidence of diabetes and all kinds of things. Also the unemployment level is much higher.

Yet when opportunities come up whereby aboriginal people are desirous of making a living for themselves, when they want to enter

into sharing resources and make a living in a very productive way, we see the government taking a hard line rather than sitting down and starting negotiations before a crisis arises, a crisis where we can look out on the water and see small fishing boats being rammed by huge government boats. These things are not right.

This is not right. This all ties in with the attitude that we have when we approach problems and start devising legislation. Is obtaining votes the only motive for devising change in legislation? Do we devise change only at a time when we feel it will be popular to do so?

I suggest that we talk about the high degree of unemployment in our aboriginal communities and that we look at the lack of opportunity that quite often exists for people of minority status. I look at people who have come here from other parts of the world and are driving taxis. All they can do is drive taxis because we have some kind of magic formula which determines that only people born in Canada who have degrees in engineering can be engineers, or that only people born in Canada who have degrees in trades can perform those trades. We have to change our attitudes if we want to make the country work, if we want to produce a society that is fair and just.

I will conclude on that note. We have to be serious about the underlying root causes of the problem and not just tinker around with the symptoms of the disease. Let us deal with the disease itself, bring about a cure for that disease, and work hard to make the country the kind of country of which we all can be proud.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville, Gun Registry; the hon. member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, Employment Insurance.

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, like my New Democratic colleague, I have a hard time supporting Bill C-44.

In my region, hundreds of thousands of workers have taken to the streets in recent weeks to oppose this bill, which does not go far enough as far as seasonal workers are concerned.

• (1645)

They also oppose the fact that Bill C-44 offers nothing to older workers. In the riding of Jonquière, in a few weeks, 250 older workers will lose their job. They have been unable to put enough into the pension plan to enjoy an honourable retirement. They hoped that the government would include passive measures in Bill C-44 to help older workers.

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I do not know whether my colleague in the New Democratic Party has this problem in his riding, but I think that everywhere in Canada at the moment, beyond what the government is saying about the employment insurance fund, it could have established passive measures enabling workers who have contributed for years, who have worked hard to earn decent salaries, to have a decent retirement so they could step aside to make room for younger people to take their place.

I would like to hear my colleague from the New Democratic Party speak on this problem, which the government is ignoring.

Mr. Gordon Earle: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her question. She is right. It is a real problem because the government is not listening to the people.

[*English*]

It is becoming more apparent, when we see the large number of demonstrations in our streets today, that governments are not listening to the people, and they should be. It is disturbing to see women marching in order to put forward to the government their need to be treated fairly. We have aboriginal people blockading roads and so forth to get the government to seriously consider their treaty rights. We have older people taking measures to get their rights.

The hon. member is quite right. This is a problem, not only in Quebec, but right across the country. It is time we had a government that is sensitive to and responds and listens to the people so that we will have a society that is fair, appropriate and just.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a supplementary question.

The government is taking money out of the EI fund. This money belongs to the workers and the employers. Does my colleague not find it outrageous that the government is using money that belongs to the workers?

The Prime Minister says that we must be compassionate and that this is the difference between his government and the Alliance. Does my colleague not think that the government is speaking out of both sides of its mouth? There is a hidden tax in the EI fund, which does nothing to help workers.

Only about 40% of all workers currently have access to EI. I would like to hear what the hon. member has to say about the government helping itself to the workers' money.

Mr. Gordon Earle: Again, the hon. member is right, Mr. Speaker. Our employment insurance critic, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, addressed this issue on many occasions. He even used unparliamentary language—"to steal"—but he was right.

[*English*]

The government has in fact taken money, which we know belongs to the unemployed workers and the employers who have paid into this fund, and used it to augment its budget and build a huge surplus. It is now tossing that money back in little dribs and drabs to the people of Atlantic Canada and telling them they should be grateful for getting a little back.

Again the member is quite right. It comes down to attitude and sensitivity on the part of government. It should be listening to the people. It should do what is right and do it by the standards which Canadians pride themselves in, which demand respect for each other and our government. In turn, the government should have respect for its citizens.

• (1650)

Mrs. Michelle Dockrill (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address Bill C-44, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act.

It is almost ironic that we are here tonight talking about the Liberals tinkering with the unemployment insurance, given that over the course of the last seven days, day after day, minute after minute, all of us have heard Canadians talking about our former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the legacy he left them.

Although at times not all Canadians agreed with the former prime minister, I think there is a sense across the country that he did believe in justice for all Canadians. What he also taught Canadians was to reach for the unreachable, to touch the untouchable and to dream the impossible dream. In order to do that he taught us to believe in ourselves and that it was the responsibility of the government to empower its citizens, and that it was also the responsibility of the federal government to play an active role in that empowerment.

Now I stand here in the Chamber and ask myself what kind of legacy the Liberal government will leave Canadians. What kind of legacy is the Prime Minister going to leave children, like my 11 year old daughter and my two year old son? Today in the discussions we had some sense of what that legacy is going to be. It is going to be about long waiting lines for health care and people who cannot access critical surgeries they need.

When we talk about the unemployed, what legacy has the government left? Being from Atlantic Canada I have to say it has been very clear that since 1993 the Liberal government has clearly made a frontal assault on not only seasonal workers but on Atlantic Canadians.

As my colleague from Halifax West noted, we have to ask ourselves, why now? Why at this point in time? We know there are a number of members on the opposite side of the House who have urged the government to recognize the problems its changes to EI

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have made and to effect some change. I guess the question is, can we deny that in this bill there is no change? No, we cannot say that. There has been some tinkering with the legislation.

The Minister of HRDC stood time and time again in the House and told us that her department was monitoring the changes to the employment insurance. Up until approximately two months ago she continued to tell us that Canadians thought it was working fine. We know that is not a reality.

In my part of the country people are not seasonal workers because they want to be. There is no such thing in the country as a seasonal worker. It is the work that is seasonal. People in my riding want nothing more than to work 365 days a year, with holidays and vacations. However, at the hands of the Liberal government they have had difficulty doing that.

Some people on the opposite side of the House talk about the dependency on the government in Atlantic Canada. In my part of the country the dependency was created by the same Liberal government. We had walls which cost Canadian taxpayers over a million dollars. We heard about projects like Scotia Rainbow. Cape Breton Island is full of those kinds of projects. Were those projects initiated to assist people in gaining employment? No, they were not.

• (1655)

The reason for those projects and others was to make sure that the Liberal government could continue to funnel money to its friends and do it on the backs of poor individuals in Cape Breton who wanted nothing more than to get up every morning, go to work, come home and feel good about their ability to feed and clothe their kids.

When we talk about dependency, it has been created by the government. In 1997 less than 20% of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 qualified for unemployment insurance. We heard the government stand up time and time again to talk about how good it had been and how much it had done for youth. Today that figure is only 15%. That is the good job the government has done.

Thirty-two per cent of women who are unemployed receive employment insurance benefits. I even have a problem referring to it as the government employment insurance. As we know, it originated as a safety net, as unemployment insurance. We paid into it in the event there was a possibility that some day we might have to take out of that. However, when the name changed the government abandoned the unemployed of this country.

Why change it now? Are we on the eve of an election? Mr. Speaker, you might have more of an inside track than I do, but it sure sounds like it.

In 1995 the finance minister's own words were that any economic recovery would bypass Cape Breton. This is about buying votes.

Everyone knows it. Backbenchers on the government side know that is what it is about. This is not about helping the unemployed. This is not about helping seasonal workers. This is about taking money from an individual's cheque for a specific purpose and then using it for another purpose.

I think that is the definition of fraud, when we take something meant for something specific and use it for something entirely different. We have a finance minister who sits in the House and who goes across the country and boasts about his \$33 billion surplus. What does this legislation mean in terms of putting anything back? It means 1.5% of that \$33 billion.

Do Atlantic Canadians buy this? No way. Do Canadians buy this? No way. We have a Liberal government that talks about values and talks about its commitment to social programs, but Canadians have suffered from the actions of the Liberal government.

I have no doubt that the government should never underestimate Atlantic Canadians. Atlantic Canadians sent them a clear message in 1997 and said "No more. You are not going to use us any more". Atlantic Canadians will say that again.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphan Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague. I have here an OECD document entitled "The OECD Jobs Strategy". It makes several recommendations. Some of these recommendations are to make work schedules more flexible, and to review unemployment packages and related benefits.

• (1700)

The report says further:

In order to bring more flexibility to the labour market in a number of countries, it was essential to make unemployment packages and other social benefits less generous, to tighten up eligibility rules.

The following quote can be found further in the report:

Canada is the only country which appears to have implemented the recommendations regarding the reduction of the level and length of benefits made as a result of the first set of studies.

Does this mean that the government is implementing international strategies dictated by the OECD in the belief that if benefits are too generous, workers will become lazy and will no longer want to work? People do not want handouts; they want work. That is abundantly clear.

We have seen the government make indiscriminate cuts without a care about their impact on families. I have people coming to my office who in February will experience the spring gap. They will not qualify for social assistance and their unemployment benefits will run out. What are they going to live on? Thin air? I believe the government is completely out of touch with the harsh economic realities in certain regions. It makes no sense whatsoever.

I ask the government to go further with this bill, it can do it. All summer long, we heard it say it could not do anything without introducing a bill. Here is that bill, but it does nothing. It is totally absurd. I am looking forward to my colleague's remarks on this.

[English]

Mrs. Michelle Dockrill: Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is a doubt in anybody's mind how much more difficult the government has made it for Canadians, whether it is people trying to access health care, whether it is people trying to access unemployment insurance or whether it is our youth who are trying to access a quality education, one they can afford.

Tonight there will be 1.5 million Canadian children going to bed hungry. The reality is very clear, especially to the people in my part of the country. This is about an election, not about the unemployed. What a legacy for this Prime Minister to leave Canada: 1.5 million Canadian children who will be going to bed hungry tonight. Children are not poor. They come from poor families.

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to speak in the debate this evening. Before I get into the substance of my speech, I want to say that I will be splitting my time with the member for Cumberland—Colchester.

Atlantic Canada has a big seasonal economy. We have a lot of seasonal workers in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. As we are all very well aware, the first set of changes brought in by the Liberal government a few years ago had the effect of making life totally and completely miserable for seasonal workers in Atlantic Canada.

We should be under no illusions. The changes that the Liberals are bringing in today in Bill C-44 will not make life any better for seasonal workers in Atlantic Canada. As a matter of fact, they will make very little change at all because most of the changes coming forth under Bill C-44 are really only cosmetic changes.

There are a couple of changes to the clawback provision and the intensity rule. It also makes it a little bit easier on folks who are on maternity leave to get back into the system again. We fully intend to support these kinds of changes but we have to make it perfectly clear what Bill C-44 does not do. Bill C-44 will be looked at for what it does not do more than for what it does.

• (1705)

We have to stress that the new rules will not change, in any way, shape or form, the qualifying time for a seasonal worker. It will not change the number of hours that a seasonal worker will need to qualify for employment insurance.

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The new rules will not change the duration of time that an individual can draw employment insurance for.

The new rules, believe it or not, will not do a single thing with respect to the divisor rule, which is a millstone around the neck of a seasonal worker because it lowers the benefits of seasonal workers by as much as \$100 or \$120 a week.

For the last two and a half to three years we have been screaming for those kinds of changes and we have not been able to effect these changes. However, the Liberals have brought in a couple of cosmetic changes that they feel will get them through an election campaign over the next couple of months.

The net result of all the various cutbacks the government has made over the last three and a half year period to employment insurance has been that only 35% of people who get laid off actually qualify for benefits. Because women happen to be in a different work pattern than men, maybe it is because of family—

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I apologize for interrupting the hon. member's remarks.

There have been consultations among political parties and I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion in order to permit consideration of the veterans bill tomorrow, which only came through committee today. I move:

That notwithstanding Standing Order 76.1(1), the House authorizes the consideration of Bill C-41 on Friday, October 6, 2000.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The House has heard the motion as presented by the government House leader. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-44, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Norman Doyle: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying a moment ago, only 30% of the women who get laid off in this nation will qualify for benefits. That is absolutely horrendous for seasonal workers in Atlantic Canada.

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I do not know if all members of the House fully realize and respect what seasonal workers go through in Atlantic Canada. We have a big seasonal economy in Atlantic Canada. We have a lot of fishermen, loggers and construction workers, people who make a very valuable contribution to this country, and that contribution is not recognized.

I was appalled a few days ago when I heard the member for Calgary—Nose Hill make the statement that the government is changing the unemployment insurance rules when seasonal workers are already making a comfortable living. She is saying this to the member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, who a couple of days ago informed the House that 75% of the seasonal workers in New Brunswick make less than \$10,000 a year. I would imagine that these numbers also apply everywhere in the Atlantic region, in Cape Breton, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island: 75% of seasonal workers make less than \$10,000 a year.

• (1710)

I cannot understand how the member for Calgary—Nose Hill could say that fishermen make a comfortable living. Sure we have some fishermen who make a comfortable living but, for the most part, most of them do not. What about the loggers in—

Mr. Jim Pankiw: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The hon. member knows that the member for Calgary—Nose Hill clarified what her remarks were. He is deliberately misrepresenting—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): That is not a point of order. That is debate.

Mr. Norman Doyle: Mr. Speaker, we know what the reform alliance said about Atlantic Canadians and what its attitude is toward employment insurance. It has been documented. It has been in the press a great deal. I know those members are very sensitive about that but they will have to live with it.

The member for Calgary—Nose Hill feels that the fishermen, the loggers and the construction workers in Atlantic Canada are making a comfortable living and says that we should not be giving them employment insurance. I was astounded to hear those kinds of remarks. It shows the blatant ignorance that the Alliance Party has of Atlantic Canadians.

I do not see any changes in this bill with regard to easing the qualifying requirements for regular benefits or anything that increases the time that an individual can draw benefits. Seasonal workers often refer to that time as the black hole, the time when they run out of employment insurance benefits and the time when they will be starting their seasonal job. They often find that employment insurance runs out about half-way through. They may have to go to welfare or to savings that they have accumulated over a number of years in order to get by until the seasonal job starts again.

It is terrible the way government has treated seasonal workers. It has not recognized the kind of valuable contribution that seasonal workers make to the economy.

Can we do without fishermen? No. Can we do without loggers? No. Can we do without construction workers? No. We in this House have to recognize the kind of contribution that seasonal workers make not only to Atlantic Canada, but to Quebec, to northern Ontario and to Alberta. Virtually all of Canada has, to some extent, seasonal employment in certain parts of various provinces.

It is no wonder the government has a \$32 billion surplus.

I went to a briefing a couple of days ago over at HRDC and I asked the question “How much money do you have in surplus in the EI account?” They gave me the official numbers, “\$32 billion”. I said “How much are you going to spend on these changes?” They said “\$500 million”.

What we find is that the federal government is giving back 1.5% to the seasonal workers of Canada, who depend so much on a decent employment insurance system to see them through.

I am terribly disappointed that the cabinet representative for Newfoundland has not spoken to the bill and has not spoken about employment insurance in the House over the last three and a half years that I have been here. Virtually none of the Liberal members from Newfoundland have had anything to say about seasonal workers in Atlantic Canada or in Newfoundland and what changes should be made to the Employment Insurance Act to make it a little bit better for these people.

• (1715)

I am terribly disappointed the Liberals have decided to abandon the seasonal workers in Newfoundland and the rest of Atlantic Canada. The growing reality is the pending federal election and it has finally gotten to the Liberals to make these few cosmetic changes. They could have easily made these changes three months ago, or three and a half years ago when they were elected.

These changes could have been made but now with the pending federal election they want to give the impression to the seasonal workers in Atlantic Canada that they are doing something substantive to help them. They are doing absolutely nothing. The Liberal Party has not yet found its social conscience. It did not rediscover its social conscience.

I have a few words to say on EI as it pertains to women in the workforce. I said earlier that only 30% of unemployed Canadian women actually qualify for benefits these days.

In the spring budget the Liberals made much of the fact that EI maternity benefits would be extended from six months to a full year. Given the fact that 30% of women qualified for benefits and

given that it is harder to qualify for maternity benefits in this day and age, much more difficult than for regular benefits, only a political party with the gall of the Liberal Party would boast about the improvement it has made to the maternity benefits. However, I cannot pursue this subject because my time has expired.

[Translation]

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech made by my colleague from the Progressive Conservative Party.

In a few days, we will have the march of women. Women have a lot of demands with regard to poverty. The majority of self-employed and part time workers are women. These jobs pay less for women.

We would have thought that, on the eve of the march of women, the government would have been more open to the demands of women in Bill C-44. Unfortunately, it chose to turn a deaf ear. The Prime Minister also refused to meet with them.

Can the member from the Progressive Conservative Party tell us what the government should have done in this bill to counter rising poverty for women in modern society?

[English]

Mr. Norman Doyle: Mr. Speaker, I am very well aware of the problem the member raises with respect to women looking for that meeting with the Prime Minister. Only yesterday I contacted the Prime Minister's office on behalf of women to request that he meet with them when they come to Ottawa.

The government has done very little for women with the employment insurance changes. We are all very much aware of what the statistics are. Thirty-five per cent of people nationally qualify for employment insurance when they are unemployed but the figures are a whole lot worse for women. Thirty per cent—and I think a member a moment ago said 32%—of women qualify for employment insurance.

With a \$32 billion surplus the government could have made it a little better on everyone, including women, great numbers of whom are in the seasonal workforce, especially in the tourism industry and what have you. The Liberals have neglected women and Canadians generally. I think they will find that people will not treat them kindly when the election is called.

Mrs. Michelle Dockrill (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will read for my hon. colleague a little comment that comes from my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst, on the human face of unemployment insurance. It is from a mother and says "It shows the complete lack of compassion on the part of the government when a mother is not given an opportunity to support her

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children and when instead her money is used to balance the budget". This clearly shows the direct correlation between the hungry Canadian children that there are as we sit in the Chamber tonight, and the government's devastation of unemployment insurance.

• (1720)

Would the member like to comment on whether the government could have gone further with the EI legislation and in effect made some good strides toward eliminating poverty in the country?

Mr. Norman Doyle: Mr. Speaker, the member made very good comments.

I was on a poverty committee that travelled to every single province in Canada speaking to people about their problems. The main point so many people made when they came before us to present their briefs was that with respect to poverty and children, the children come from poor parents, from mothers and fathers who cannot find work, mothers and fathers who have been denied benefits through employment insurance. The employment insurance scheme and the government cutbacks over the last couple of years have played a very big part in the poverty in families. The government could have done a whole lot more. Some \$32 billion is a massive amount of money to accumulate on the backs of parents and workers who are struggling to make ends meet on a daily basis. The government could have done a whole lot more.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to discuss this issue today because it has been on my mind for a long time.

The government proceeds to do things that the private sector cannot do. It would be fraudulent and dishonest and it would be subject to fines if in private life or in business in the private sector I did what the government does every single payday. Every single payday every single employee in the country gets a paycheque and on the stub there is a little column marked EI, employment insurance premiums. It is not employment insurance premiums. That is false labelling. It would not comply according to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, consumer affairs or anything else because it is not accurate. It is not true and it is not honest.

Every single person in Canada who gets paid tomorrow will get a cheque and a certain amount will have been taken off their pay for an employment insurance premium. That is not what it is. It is false labelling. It is a surcharge for working.

Already the government has a \$32 billion dollar surplus gathered together in its unemployment insurance fund. It does not need any more money as far as that goes. Certainly it should not be marked as an employment insurance premium when it is not. At the very

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least there should be two columns. One should be marked employment insurance premiums and one should be marked surcharge for working or work tax because that is exactly what it is. It goes into general revenues. It has nothing to do with unemployment insurance premiums. It happens every single payday to every single person. Even government paycheques are marked the same way.

If in business I sold a garment that was said to be 100% cotton and it was not 100% cotton, I would be charged with false labelling. If I sold a car that had 40,000 kilometres on it but I said it only had 20,000 kilometres on it, I could be put in jail. I have to say what I am charging money for but the government does not have to do that. It is false labelling. It is misleading, it is dishonest and it is unfair. It is a tax on working and it should be labelled as such.

One would not get away with that in the private sector. Recently there was a case where a grocery store mislabelled a chicken. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency came down on that grocery store because it had mislabelled the chicken and the person who was paying a certain amount of money thought that he was getting a certain product and he was not.

That is what happens every single day on every single paycheque in Canada. People think they are buying unemployment insurance when in fact it is just a surcharge, a tax that goes into general revenues. I could not get away with that in the private sector and I do not know how the government can get away with it either. That is one thing I wanted to talk about.

• (1725)

The other thing I wanted to talk about is the seasonal worker issue which comes up so often. People who are fortunate enough to live in areas where there are low unemployment rates do not understand what it is like to live in an area where there are seasonal workers and employment is difficult to find.

I recently went to Calgary, Alberta. What impressed me the most was not the buildings, the fancy cars or the people, but the signs in the windows everywhere which read now hiring and help wanted. They were everywhere. If a person were to put up help wanted signs in my town, he or she would need police protection because there would be so many people trying to get the job. People who make comments about the lazy Atlantic Canadians who do not want to work and about the people who live high on unemployment insurance just do not have a clue what they are talking about.

I was in the house manufacturing business before I went into politics. We had 125 employees and we tried our best to maintain a 12 month a year operation but, come October or November, there was just no market and nobody to buy the houses. It was too cold to place them, set them up and establish them so we had to have layoffs. The management and the employees worked together to try

to get through as long as they could, but when there was no other choice, a layoff was required. They were seasonal workers. There was no choice. There was no alternative. That is all that could happen. Everybody tried to avoid it. Nobody wanted to go on unemployment insurance. Nobody wanted to receive half pay or 55% of their pay. Who can live on 55%?

That is what happens in certain areas of the country. Certain areas do not have the opportunities and the resources or what have you to provide full time employment. Those people who are on unemployment should not be punished just because next year the same thing is going to happen. It is not their choice. They do not have any opportunities or alternatives. It just happens. Everybody tries to work around it. Everybody tries to find alternatives for work, but in some cases there just is not any. In that case there is unemployment insurance.

To fine people, to punish them because they are forced onto unemployment is not fair. This bill removes that condition and at least that is an improvement. It is amazing that a Liberal government would bring it in in the first place when the Liberals claim to have a social conscience and have the interests of Canadians at heart, especially those Canadians who need help. For them to devise such a scheme and punish people because they cannot find year round work is unbelievable.

It is incredible that only 35% of the applicants for unemployment insurance will be paid. Only 35% of the unemployed are able to qualify for benefits but 100% of the working people pay in. It does not seem fair. Again it is mislabelling. For 100% of the people to pay in and only 35% or fewer, especially in the case of unemployed women who get less, to be paid is completely unacceptable. It indicates how out of touch the Liberals are with the areas that have unemployment. It is a policy that punishes people. To change it now with these token election changes is almost offensive and insulting because it would be done just because an election is on the horizon.

For years we have been complaining about this, groups have been lobbying to get a change and there has not even been an acknowledgement of the problem. Now that there is an election on the horizon, all of a sudden we are going to make these changes and ram them through real fast. The Liberals are going to repeal these offensive changes which they were so delighted at putting in. Certainly we welcome the changes but the timing is offensive.

The focus should be on job creation. Instead of focusing on unemployment insurance, the whole focus should be on job creation. There should be a program to develop jobs and to provide the incentives for employers to hire more people. There should be incentives to reduce trade barriers among the provinces and among countries. There should be ways to overcome all the barriers to trade for industry and small business in areas of high unemployment. Are there any? No.

In fact we had a program called the Canada jobs fund. It was abused and neglected and because of that we have lost that fund. That was a good fund. In my own area it was a good fund. It was delivered by people in my own community and now it has been taken away and given to a regional office of ACOA. I am afraid we are going to lose the benefits of that program.

I can see, Mr. Speaker, that you are going to shut me down any minute so I will end my speech. Those are my main issues on this bill. I will be delighted to answer any questions members may have.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): I have received notice from the hon. member for Repentigny that he is unable to move his motion during private members' hour on Friday, October 6. It has not been possible to arrange an exchange of positions in the order of precedence.

Accordingly I am directing the table officers to drop that item of business to the bottom of the order of precedence. Private members' hour will thus be cancelled and the House will continue with the business before it prior to private members' hour.

It being 5.30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Pankiw (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Canadian Alliance) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Canada should immediately double the "basic personal deduction" for Canadian taxpayers over the age of 69.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to introduce the motion which would double the basic personal exemption for people over the age of 69.

Before I enter into an explanation of the rationale behind the motion, I would like to seek unanimous consent of the House to deem it votable since the subcommittee deemed it non-votable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Does the hon. member for Saskatoon—Humboldt have unanimous consent of the House to present the motion?

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Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Jim Pankiw: Mr. Speaker, I sought unanimous consent with the full expectation that it would be denied by Liberal members.

It is noteworthy to draw to the attention of the House and all Canadians the undemocratic manner in which the Liberals are intent on governing the nation. Therefore, before I move into a discussion of the actual motion before the House, in an attempt to illustrate the importance of that, I would like to highlight the degree to which members of the House and all Canadians are deprived of great ideas put forward by members on their behalf.

I will summarize some of the bills I have before parliament which will never have the opportunity to be voted on because Liberal members are unwilling to have them come forward for a vote.

I have a bill to protect the legal definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman. I have a bill which would require fixed election dates so that the Prime Minister can no longer play games with Canadians on the timing of an election. I have a bill which would provide longer jail sentences for those who use a firearm in the commission of a criminal offence.

I have a bill to provide for a referendum to determine whether Canadians wish medically unnecessary abortions to be covered under the Canada Health Act. I have a bill to amend the Canada Labour Code to make trade union membership in the federal public service optional. I have a bill protecting persons accused of a crime from undue public speculation before guilt has been established.

I also have a bill which would amend the Parliament of Canada Act regarding recognized political parties, requiring an official party to have at least 10% of the seats in the House, which seems to me to be a very reasonable level and would prevent the type of fringe parties we have, for example, the fifth party in the House.

I have a bill which would require that companies no longer to be forced to make payroll deductions on behalf of the federal government and a bill requiring transparency in pricing of goods for sale in Canada. In other words, a listing of taxes could no longer be contained in the price of a product but would have to be specifically listed.

I also have a bill which would require federal transfers for welfare under the Canada health and social transfer to be contingent upon whether that province has a workfare program. I also have a bill to eliminate official bilingualism.

Some of my motions include repealing the Employment Equity Act, entrenching property rights in the constitution, criminal code

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punishment for persons wilfully disrupting electronic commerce, and the motion I have currently before the House today.

On the eve of a federal election I have to wonder how the Liberal members would handle questions from their constituents as to why they were unwilling to vote and have a public record of whether or not they supported these types of motions and bills. I hope their constituents are fully aware of this undemocratic inclination and will replace them with a Canadian Alliance government.

• (1735)

My motion would double the basic personal exemption for people over the age of 69. The rationale behind it is that seniors who have accumulated registered retirement savings plans are required at that age to liquidate them into a registered retirement income fund.

The retirement savings that have been accumulated over a lifetime up to that point may have to sustain a person's well-being, for decades to come in some cases. The timing and use of the retirement fund should be at the discretion of the individual as opposed to being a legislated statutory requirement of a percentage that must be removed and liquidated from the sheltered savings plan. Notwithstanding that and more to the point, my motion would help to reduce the tax burden incurred as a result of the law that requires liquidation of the savings.

Doubling the basic personal exemption for seniors over the age of 69 would affect not only those who have accumulated savings but seniors who have no savings. My motion would place their tax exempt level at a much higher rate and would enable them to earn more income from whatever source of income they may have, to avoid the taxman to a level that is a bit more reasonable than the current level of only \$7,231.

It is worthwhile to examine the Liberal record with respect to taxation and the tax savings that seniors would gain from my measure as opposed to what the government is doing with their money.

If my motion were law seniors would retain more money in their pockets at the end of each tax year. The government has seen fit to use that money for such things as fountains and golf courses in the Prime Minister's riding. That is offensive to seniors, especially low income seniors who do not have a retirement nest egg and are forced to work to subsidize their living, with the taxman taking a bite out of their earnings at such a low level.

The Liberal record does not just include wasteful spending. In the seven years of Liberal government we have seen our national debt increase by almost \$100 billion. This represents a drain on our social programs because such a large part of the annual tax collected by the government each year must be used to service the debt instead of paying for useful social programs that we all care about, such as health care and education.

As a result of not only the waste but the fiscal mismanagement by the Liberal government, Canadians are seeing a declining standard of living as compared to the United States. We have the highest level of personal income tax of any country in the industrialized world.

Last year the government had a \$12 billion surplus. It has promoted this fact quite widely and quite proudly. For the benefit of the House and all Canadians, although the word surplus is a sexy word, sounds good and is appealing, the truth is that it represents an overtaxation. Part of the overtaxation was incurred by seniors who were forced by law to liquidate their savings. My motion would minimize the tax grab on those seniors.

The Liberals have increased taxes 63 times since they came to power. I contrast that with the Canadian Alliance because since we are heading into a federal election it is worthwhile to explain the difference in the two approaches.

While the Liberals engage in wasteful spending on frivolous programs, the Canadian Alliance believes that the federal government should be focused and streamlined, that we should end wasteful spending and that patronage should not exist. Grants and giveaways by the federal government should not exist and should certainly not be based on who are the friends of the Liberal government.

• (1740)

Our plan, to a large extent, would make my motion not necessary. The basic personal deduction I am proposing should be doubled for seniors over the age of 69. A Canadian Alliance government would peg the deduction at \$10,000 for every Canadian, including the spousal exemption, which would end tax discrimination against single income families. We would also provide a \$3,000 deduction for every child.

For example, a husband and wife with two children earning \$26,000 a year would pay zero tax. Our tax applied to income above that level would be a single rate of 17%. If a family of four was making \$30,000 the total percentage of income tax they would pay would be approximately 2% because they would pay the 17% only on the amount above their exemptions, which would be \$26,000. In other words, they would be taxed 17% of \$4,000 or about 2% of their overall income.

A further example is that the same family earning \$100,000 would pay 17% of \$74,000, which would be the balance between their exemption level and the \$100,000 income level. That would come to approximately 13% of their income.

Although it is a single rate of tax it is actually a graduated scale. In the case of a family of four earning \$26,000 or \$30,000 or \$100,000, they would go from a rate of 0% to 2% to 13% and so on as the income climbs.

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It is a very fair and progressive system. It would deviate from the regressive nature of the current tax system of the Liberals which penalizes people for working overtime, working hard, applying themselves and earning more money by bumping them into higher rates of income tax.

Mr. Paul Szabo: It is called progressivity, not regressivity.

Mr. Jim Pankiw: One of the rules of debate in the House of Commons is not to be taken in by the heckling from the other side, but I cannot let the comment go. I heard the hon. member on the other side. Actually he has it backward. It is regressive to start increasing the percentage of tax paid because people are working harder.

I can tell a personal story. In the last federal election campaign I visited the town of Humboldt. A few residents of that town work in the potash mines, not that far away. An individual told me he never works any more than one overtime shift per pay period because it does not pay. That is exactly because of the regressive nature of the tax system of the Liberal government.

The regressive approach is not restricted solely to the marginal increased tax rates the government has in place but also applies to many other rules, excise taxes, surtaxes and surcharges that the Canadian Alliance would completely eliminate. It also applies to the tax grab the government places on the retirement nest eggs of seniors, which my motion would alleviate on behalf of Canada's seniors.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the motion of the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt asking that consideration be given by the government to doubling the basic personal deduction for taxpayers over age 69.

I checked the notice paper to get the wording and the member's motion in fact says basic personal deduction. There is no such thing in the Income Tax Act as a basic personal deduction. It is called basic personal amount and it is a non-refundable tax credit. On the basis of simply the wording of the motion and with the words basic personal deduction in quotations in the motion, it actually is out of order.

However, had the member had a look at the Income Tax Act, I assume he would have got it correct. I will respond to the member's motion as if he had referred to doubling the non-refundable tax credit called the basic personal amount.

The purpose of Motion No. 305 is to provide additional tax assistance to taxpayers over age 69 by doubling the basic personal amount. I appreciate the hon. member's recommendation. However I would point out that the government already provides special tax recognition for seniors. Furthermore, the government has

reduced taxes substantially in recent years for all Canadians, including seniors, and will continue to do so as resources permit.

● (1745)

Let me explain to the House why we should not support Motion No. 305. I would like to clarify to my colleagues that the purpose of the basic personal credit, a non-refundable tax credit, is to contribute to tax fairness by ensuring that Canadians earning less than a basic amount do not pay tax. In addition, it is important to note that the basic personal amount has been increased each year since 1998.

As hon. members know, the 2000 budget proposed a five year tax reduction plan. This plan provides real and lasting tax reductions for Canadians to ensure that all taxpayers, including seniors, will see their taxes reduced and an improvement in their standard of living.

In particular, the five year tax reduction plan will increase the amount that can be earned tax free by at least \$8,000 by the year 2004. The basic personal credit for the year 2000 is equal to 17% of \$7,231, which reduces federal taxes payable by \$1,229.

Other measures outlined in this plan will benefit seniors. They include: first, the reduction of the middle income tax rate to 23% from 26%, starting with a 2% reduction to 24% in July 2000, which has already happened; second, increasing the amounts at which the middle and top rates apply to at least \$35,000 and \$70,000 respectively; and eliminating as of July 1, 2000 the 5% deficit reduction surtax on middle income Canadians and completely eliminating that surtax by 2004.

In addition, the five year tax reduction plan also restored full indexation of the personal income tax system. In particular, the tax reduction plan put an end to bracket creep by restoring full indexation to the income tax system at the beginning of this year. Of particular significance to Canadian seniors is the indexation of the age credit, another non-refundable tax credit available to seniors.

The five year tax reduction plan is the most significant tax cut in 25 years. Let me make it clear that, while substantial, the tax relief outlined in the five year tax reduction plan represents the least, not the most, the government will do. Indeed, as indicated by the hon. finance minister to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance on June 8, 2000, the measures outlined in the five year plan will be accelerated. Furthermore, the government will explore new options for tax relief for all Canadians, including seniors.

As I stated earlier, the personal Canadian income tax system already has measures in place that provide special tax assistance for seniors. There is the age credit, which was introduced to reduce the tax burden supported by elderly Canadians. This is the measure used to recognize the special circumstances of seniors as it affects their ability to pay personal income taxes. For the year 2000 the age

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credit provides a federal tax benefit for those aged 65 and over equal to 17% of \$3,531, which reduces their federal taxes payable by up to \$600. In order to target the age credit to those seniors who are most in need, the credit is reduced by 15% of individual net income in excess of \$26,284 and is fully phased out once income reaches \$49,824.

I would also like to bring to the attention of the House the pension income credit. This is a 17% credit on up to \$1,000 of pension income, which provides additional protection against inflation for the retirement income of elderly Canadians. The government also provides significant tax assistance to help people save for their retirement through registered retirement savings plans, commonly referred to as RRSPs, and registered pension plans, commonly referred to as RPPs. For these plans, the tax owing on the contribution and investment income is deferred until income is received out of those plans. In other words, contributions are tax deductible and investment income is not taxed as it accrues.

Federal revenue costs of tax assistance for savings, pension plans and RRSPs were about \$17.5 billion in 1998. This means that if tax assistance for retirement savings did not exist, taxpayers would have paid approximately \$17.5 billion more in taxes for that one year.

• (1750)

Clearly the system of retirement savings represents a significant benefit for individuals and helps to ensure that seniors have adequate incomes in their retirement.

It is also important to recognize that in addition to tax assistance, seniors have the opportunity to benefit from other federal programs such as the old age security, the guaranteed income supplement, and the Canada and Quebec pension plans. I would emphasize that Canada's public pension system has significantly improved the income position of seniors relative to the working age population over the past several decades. From 1951 to 1997 the average incomes of seniors rose from 55% of that of the working age population to over 81% of that of the working age population. It is very significant.

A number of international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Bank have concluded that Canada has one of the best retirement income systems in the world.

There is no doubt that the government provides tax assistance in recognition of the ability of seniors to pay income tax. In addition, the recent tax reduction plan significantly reduces taxes for all Canadians, including seniors. Combined with other federal programs, the government directs significant resources to help meet the needs of our seniors. The government is committed to continuing to reduce the tax burden to all Canadians, including seniors.

I will make reference to a couple of the member's comments about the fact that our tax system is regressive. He said it a couple of times. I noted for him that it was progressive. He disagreed, saying that I had it totally reversed.

The member will know that progressivity in an income tax system is something that is in every industrialized country in the world. Progressivity means that the higher the income, the higher the effective rate of taxation one pays and the more one pays.

I asked the finance critic of the Canadian Alliance about progressivity and why the flat tax proposal it announced today would go to a single rate of x per cent. It will be the same regardless of how much income one makes.

That to me is not progressivity. It means that we are to shift the burden from high income earners to the rest of taxpayers. Even though they would say we are to increase the basic personal amount for some and reduce the number of taxpayers, all of a sudden what it means, if they are to collect the same amount of taxes and if high income earners get a big tax break, is that the only place to make it up is to tax more heavily those in the middle income categories.

If the member does not agree with that, he would also have to admit that if about \$17.5 billion of income tax revenue is to be lost, the only way to make it up is to slash services and programs that are assisting Canadians, including seniors. That will be a big issue in the next election.

In fact, our current system is a progressive system. To reduce it and to lower the burden for high income earners at the expense of the low and middle income earners is in fact regressive. That is the regressivity.

The member has it wrong. I would suggest to the member that not only should he check the wording in his motion to make sure he brings accurate information to the House, he should also look at the reality of a single tax system which would take the income tax revenue that the government gets from the highest income earners in Canada and recover that either through income taxes or through service fees charged to all Canadians at low and middle income levels.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to take part in this debate on Motion No. 305, brought forward by the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt, asking the Government of Canada to immediately double the basic personal deduction for taxpayers over the age of 69.

It certainly is an interesting and well intentioned suggestion, since it is aimed at helping seniors maintain a good standard of

living in their old age. However, I think such a measure cannot apply to all people over the age of 69 regardless of their income.

• (1755)

For the sake of social fairness, it is crucial that we set an income limit over which this deduction would be pointless. We could also think about a decreasing scale above the fixed ceiling.

In a report entitled *A Portrait of Seniors in Canada*, Statistics Canada indicates that the average income of single seniors decreases somewhat in the older age groups. In 1997, the average income from all sources for single seniors between age 65 and 69 was \$21,400, compared to \$19,500 for seniors 70 years of age and older. Seniors currently have access to three taxable public programs: old age security, the Canada pension plan and régime des rentes du Québec, and the guaranteed income supplement.

As in the overall population, single senior men have a significantly higher income than single senior women. In 1997, single men 65 years of age and older had an average income of \$24,300, almost \$6,000 more than single senior women.

Also, the income of seniors varies from province to province. In Ontario and western Canada, the income of seniors is higher than in Quebec and especially in Atlantic Canada.

To double the basic personal deduction of taxpayers 65 years of age and older would be very beneficial. However, some seniors start cashing in their RRSPs at age 70.

What would this extra money do for our seniors? Not only on a moral level would it be a sign of the state's gratefulness for its aging population, but also on a financial level it would provide a support seniors rightly deserve.

What about our senior citizens' expenses? In some cases they have medical and related expenses. At long last we would live in a society that would no longer be ungrateful to the senior citizens who have greatly contributed to the system.

Let us not forget inflation. Senior citizens' incomes do not keep up with price increases. It is wrong to believe that we have fewer needs when we grow old. It is often said that senior citizens spend less on food, clothing and entertainment. This is wrong, since like the rest of the population, senior citizens spend a significant part of their total budget on basic necessities such as food, housing, clothing and transportation.

Speaking of housing, housing costs account for a sizeable portion of the total expenses of senior citizens living on their own. In 1997, they spent over one out of every four dollars on housing. If we stay healthy, it is not our age but the lack of money that will slow us down. This extra money could make life a lot nicer for a number of our fellow citizens getting on in age.

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Senior citizens make a significant contribution to society through their volunteer activities. A more generous basic personal deduction could be seen as a reimbursement for the indirect expenses incurred by elderly volunteers.

I am in favour of this motion, but the government should listen to the representations the Bloc Québécois has been making since 1993, namely, that the tax system should be entirely overhauled. Such a reform should take those making less than \$30,000 a year off the tax roll. This proposal would help not only senior citizens, but a whole category of our fellow citizens who cannot make ends meet.

• (1800)

[English]

Mrs. Michelle Dockrill (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I could not help but listen to the member from the Alliance when he talked about his motion. The first thing that came to my mind was, will the real Alliance Party stand up?

The member talked about the initiative as helping seniors across the country. I do not think we will find anybody in the Chamber who is not committed to initiatives that will help seniors. However, when I listened to the member I could not help but wonder why his party did not want to help the largest portion of seniors in terms of a national pharmacare program.

We have read study after study that talk about our aging population and the fact that, as we all know, when we get older unfortunately we have the need to access the health care system. He talked about putting money back into the pockets of seniors. I know that the seniors in my riding would really appreciate having some assistance in paying for their drugs. In my part of the country I have seniors who literally play Russian roulette in choosing between taking medication or buying groceries. This winter it will be about putting fuel in their tanks to heat their homes.

The hon. member talked about spending on frivolous programs. Is the Alliance saying that medicare is a frivolous program or that the Canada pension program is a frivolous program? It is interesting to listen to the Alliance day after day. When we look at some of the initiatives that have been put forth by the Alliance over the last three years, there is one key thread that continues to run through all of them and that is the divisiveness which its initiatives cause in this country.

The member talks about seniors. Why not, as I said, support an initiative that would help all seniors, not just some seniors? Why not have an initiative to provide that anybody who makes \$15,000 or less does not have to pay income tax? That would surely help an awful lot of seniors in my part of the country.

Private Members' Business

What we have is the Alliance again bringing forward initiatives that will create division among various groups of our population. We know all too well that once it creates division the Alliance is very good at fueling that division.

It was interesting to note that the hon. member who spoke prior to me said that men over 65 living alone actually make \$6,000 more than women over 65 who live alone. Is the member for the Alliance targeting men with his initiatives? If the member truly believes that it is the responsibility of the Alliance to create initiatives that help all seniors, why does his party not support a national pharmacare program? Seniors across the country have clearly indicated that they need it and they need it now. That is clearly what would assist seniors to put money back into their pockets.

I talked a number of times today about the legacy that the government is leaving Canadians. We have 1.4 million children living in poverty. We have a majority of seniors who worked hard all of their lives with the hope that they could sit down, enjoy life and smell the roses. However, seniors are being gouged because they have to pay exorbitant prices for drugs which they need to maintain breath in their bodies.

• (1805)

What we have seen from the member from the Alliance Party is an initiative that clearly will cause division within the groups in our society. If the member is really committed to helping seniors put money back into their pockets, then I ask the member and his party to support a national pharmacare program that will do exactly what the member says he would like to do.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want the hon. member from the NDP party to know that there is no question that we would certainly support a pharmacare program.

When I was a councillor back in 1977, the mayor of the day was Samuel Davis. He was the first and only Jewish gentleman to be mayor in Saint John. Samuel said to me "Elsie, I want you to go out to east Saint John. There's a meeting out there. They're calling it the seniors' club". He said he did not know what it meant but he wanted me to go. I was not a senior then but off I went.

When I walked into the meeting I was really impressed with the seniors who were there. They said they wanted to get seniors involved. They wanted to get seniors who were lonely and living alone involved as well. They started their first club and today there are 34 seniors' clubs in my riding of Saint John, New Brunswick. We have brought the seniors out. A lot of them do not need medication now because they have friends, they get involved and they are busy. However, there is no question that they some need help.

This motion calls on the federal government to double the basic personal deduction for Canadian taxpayers over the age of 69. All of us in the House recognize that with a rapidly ageing population, Canada is faced with the challenge of ensuring that our senior citizens are able to live out their retirement years in dignity. The word dignity means an awful lot.

Studies show that approximately 70% of elderly Canadians are dependent on public pension plans. It should also be noted that in 1997, 662,000 Canadians aged 65 and over had incomes below Statistics Canada's low income cut-offs. In the same year, 45% of seniors aged 65 and over and living alone were considered to have low incomes compared with only 7% of seniors who lived with their families.

According to Statistics Canada, the average income of seniors across Canada is just a little over \$20,000. I want everyone here tonight to think about that. Could we live on \$20,000? How would we manage? How would we make out? No, members certainly could not do it, and seniors have a most difficult time with it.

The OAS, the old age security program, accounts for the largest part of seniors' incomes, at 29%. This is followed by CPP, 21%; retirement pensions, 20%; non-RRSP investment, 11.6%; and employment income, 7.6%. Meanwhile, 60% of the after tax income of seniors goes toward the basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothing and transportation. There is very little left for someone who is renting an apartment. They do not live in luxury.

The bottom line here is seniors. Like other segments of the population they pay too much tax. Something must be done, not only for our seniors but for all Canadian taxpayers regardless of their age.

• (1810)

Canada continues to have the highest personal income tax rates in the G-7. Federal budgetary revenues are at record levels in Canada: \$155.6 billion in fiscal year 1998-99, up 34% since 1993-94. Meanwhile personal income tax revenues were \$72.5 billion in 1998-99, up from \$51.4 billion in 1993-94. That is a 41% increase since the Liberals took power in 1993 despite the fact that Canada's real GDP grew by just 15% over the same period of time, so we know that it was increased taxes.

Although the Liberal government claims to be reducing taxes, it continues to increase CPP contributions. In the past year alone CPP premiums have increased by 40 cents.

We can and should do more for Canadians, including our seniors. However, the current government has difficulty in organizing its priorities. It chooses to carry out an agenda of wasteful government spending. We need only to ask the Auditor General of Canada about that. The people of Canada should look at his reports.

With respect to the motion before us today, the PC Party believes that the basic personal exemption, the BPE, can and should be

increased not only for those over 69 but for all Canadians. We have proposed that the BPE should be increased from its current level of \$7,131 to \$12,000. This can be done over a five year period and will remove 2.5 million Canadians from the tax rolls. Many of them are seniors and a lot of them are families in need.

I have to say I will never ever forget what Mr. Mykytyshyn said about our people back home. I come from Canada's first incorporated by royal charter, a city that built the country. Those people moved from Saint John right across the country and built it. I have to say that a lot of those people from the maritime provinces who are in Alberta were really hurt when Mr. Mykytyshyn made his statements. They said "We are out here building Alberta for heaven's sake, but we are from the maritimes". These are the Canadians who can least afford to pay income tax yet are currently forced to do so.

This would result in taxpayers saving as much as \$1,200 annually. Furthermore we have also suggested in our task force report on poverty that the value of the age credit be initially increased by \$170 by raising the amount on which it is based to \$4,482, providing much needed relief for our aging population.

The task force on poverty went out west. It went into central Canada. It went into Quebec. It went right across the nation from Newfoundland right through to B.C. There is poverty in all of the provinces.

Canadians deserve tax fairness. The reform alliance party needs to take some time to understand that concept. Its 17% flat tax proposal really is not a flat tax. It would give millionaires a \$135,000 tax break while people, such as the seniors we are talking about today, making \$20,000 would get an \$895 tax break. It is not exactly tax fairness. Perhaps the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt should tell his constituents what his party's plan would really offer.

That being said, the PC Party does not support the motion as it is written. We believe that all members of society, not just a little select group, deserve a tax break.

The reality is that the current annual cost to provide benefits to the elderly is \$24 billion for the federal government alone and it is expected to triple over the next three decades.

• (1815)

I have raised my personal concerns on more than one occasion in the House about the ability of senior citizens to pay the ever increasing cost of heating their homes. Those seniors who live in residence or in apartments will likely have to move because there will be an increase in their rents. Those seniors who continue to live in their own little houses will certainly see an increase in their heating costs unless the government does something to assist them.

Private Members' Business

Senior citizens on tightly fixed incomes do not have the flexibility to cope with soaring oil prices. I do not believe that anyone in the House will deny the potential for an extremely cold winter this year. I do not feel that the way to treat grandparents and veterans—and our veterans are all seniors in this nation—is to leave them out in the cold.

As I have stated here tonight, Canadians of all ages are in need of tax relief.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): As is the custom, the mover of the motion will have the last five minutes of the debate. After he has spoken the debate will be terminated.

Mr. Jim Pankiw (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, first, I must say that the Liberal member who followed my speech delivered his speech in a very patronizing and arrogant manner. I know he referred to the basic personal amount which I referred to as a deduction. However, everybody knows we have casual discussions in coffee shops and along hallways. In fact one of the members of another party referred to it as the basic personal exemption or the basic personal amount. He was just playing word games and semantics and avoiding the issue. Not only was he avoiding the issue, he completely missed my point and referred to the Canadian Alliance plan for a single rate tax as a flat tax.

The member was sitting there when I gave my speech. I do not know whether he was daydreaming but I gave a clear example of a family of four. I explained that under the Canadian Alliance plan, a family of four earning \$26,000 a year would pay an effective rate of zero per cent. If they earned \$30,000 they would pay 2%. If they earned \$100,000 they would pay 13%. That of course would continue to escalate up to 17% the higher their income went.

The member talked about progressivity versus regressivity and which is which. It is really interesting to note that the Liberals have a tax system in place that penalizes hard work and overtime. The more money a worker makes the more tax he or she pays, not on a graduated scale, as the Canadian Alliance is proposing, but on a percentage basis. That is regressive but the Liberals say that is progressive. Talk about word games.

Another thing the member said was that in order to do what we are proposing we would be shifting the tax burden from high income earners and putting it on middle income earners. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our plan would remove 1.4 million low income Canadians right off the tax rolls and would lower taxes for everybody.

The hon. member hypothesizes that it would not be possible to provide tax cuts to one income bracket group without burdening

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another, but the fact of the matter is that we will do this by simply cutting government waste and ending wasteful programs.

I could sit here all day and give examples of those programs: the regional economic development program, the job creation program, the grants and giveaways, the subsidization of crown corporations, and the list goes on. Perhaps the most prominent example is the fiasco and scandalous loss of a billion dollars by the human resources development minister.

Nonetheless, the point of my motion was to draw attention to the fact that the tax system as it exists is very convoluted and unfair. It is regressive. The Canadian Alliance plan would not only make the tax system progressive, it would make the tax system much more simple and much more fair.

• (1820)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired. As the motion has not been designated as a votable item, the order is dropped from the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

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

GUN REGISTRY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, on June 13, I asked the justice minister a question which she refused to answer.

On behalf of my constituents, I sincerely hope that after almost four months she has been able to find the courage to tell Canadians the truth about her badly bungled gun registry and how much it has cost taxpayers. For the benefit of the minister, I will repeat my original question.

In 1995 the justice minister tabled a document entitled "Financial Framework for Bill C-68" that projected a deficit of \$2.2 million over five years for implementation of the gun registration scheme. It is now five years later and the minister has collected less than \$17 million in user fees and the deficit is more than \$300 million. That is 150 times larger than the deficit first projected.

Who is responsible for this huge waste of money, the previous minister's ridiculous estimate or the current minister's mismanagement of the scheme?

In my supplementary question I asked the minister about the cost of her latest advertising blitz and the firearms outreach program. She ducked that question too, spouting statistics about refused and revoked licences and blocked sales of legally owned guns, all this while the minister knows full well that taxpayers did not need a half a billion dollar gun registry to achieve these results. All that was really needed was better administration of the 20 year old FAC program. As if we needed more proof, in 1999 the United States blocked 160,000 gun sales and it does not even have a gun registry.

Will the minister please provide us with a cost benefit analysis of her gun registry program? Will the minister please explain how requiring the registration of grandpa's shotgun helps to generate these bogus blocked gun sales statistics? Will the minister please explain how she is preventing these now potentially dangerous gun owners from acquiring firearms illegally from the nearest Indian reserve?

Just last week I received a response to an access to information request from the minister's department. Her bureaucrats failed to provide any information about the costs of her firearms outreach program as I had requested. The minister's bureaucrats did provide enough statistics, however, to prove her firearms outreach program was another fantastic flop in a five year series of firearms flops.

Documents show that the justice minister's plan was to process 1.4 million licence applications this summer. In fact the department's own website reveals it received less than 300,000 applications and processed only 102,000 firearms licence applications.

Will the minister tell Canadians how much her outreach program and ad campaign cost taxpayers and explain why the program was such a dismal failure?

The minister's departmental website also reveals a bigger problem than the waste of half a billion dollars of public money. As of September 2, 2000, her bureaucrats had issued only 286,000 firearms licences in the last 21 months, an average of 13,630 per month, and 339,000 licence applications were in processing or in backlog.

At its current rate of production, it will take the Department of Justice more than two years to get rid of this backlog and 12 more years to process the licences from the remaining two million gun owners. The government's very low estimates still have not even been applied. The minister's impossible deadline is now less than three months away.

Finally, the Minister of Justice still refuses to provide this year's budget for the Canadian firearms program operated by her department. The minister's minions are even stonewalling investigations from the Information Commissioner of Canada.

Sources close to the minister tell us that the gun registry has already cost taxpayers \$260 million this year and will exceed \$300 million by the end of March 2001. Will the justice minister tell Canadians what she is trying to hide?

• (1825)

Mr. John Maloney (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has not been shirking any of its responsibility concerning this major public safety initiative.

Canadians overwhelmingly share our vision and support this important program. We now have more than 1.1 million Canadians who hold or who have applied for licences under the legislation. More than 1.6 million firearms are registered. Since December 1, 1998, more than 929 licence applications have been refused for public safety concerns. As well, 1,182 licences have been revoked from individuals deemed not to be eligible to hold a licence because they pose a safety risk. The number of revocations is over 20 times higher than the total of the previous five years.

We cannot talk about the costs of this program without talking about the benefits. The benefits of this program represent an investment of \$2 per Canadian for the past five years.

The costs of the firearms program are subject to the same kinds of review and scrutiny as any other government program. The government is accepting its responsibilities, including its financial accountability. It would be refreshing if the members opposite opposing this valuable legislation would accept their responsibility for playing a positive role respecting the public safety of all Canadians.

We have an aggressive program in place to deal with providing enhanced service to Canadian firearms owners. Elements of this include the following services. We have been providing face to face assistance to help people complete their applications for licensing. We have dramatically simplified our forms. We have implemented processing and system efficiencies throughout to provide better service to Canadians more quickly. We have enhanced our call centre services to provide better and faster individualized assistance.

At the same time as we are providing better service to firearms owners we are providing better public safety to all Canadians. We are now able to do background checks before any legitimate firearms sale can proceed.

As of the end of September, over 7,770 potentially dangerous gun sales were the subject of additional scrutiny. In these cases people with histories of violence, break and enter, theft or drug involvement or people who were trying to acquire guns that they were not licensed to purchase were the subject of additional checks.

Adjournment Debate

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Angela Vautour (Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, PC): Mr. Speaker, I spoke today on the EI bill, Bill C-44, which is quite clearly a vote buying piece of legislation when we look at what the government is really doing, which is practically nothing compared to the suffering of people who have been affected by the Liberal government's 1996 cuts to unemployment insurance.

I know I only have four minutes so I will never get to everything that I want to say, but before I go into that it is important to look back at why I am a member of parliament in the House of Commons today and to look at what really happened.

In 1993 the Liberal government campaigned that it would be helping workers in rural Canada, that it would be helping to develop those regions and would make life easier for those people, like the Prime Minister said when he campaigned in Beauséjour and told seasonal workers that they were not being treated fairly in those days. Surprise, surprise. I wonder what happened once he got elected.

Once the Prime Minister was elected he introduced all kinds of legislation in the House. The bill that was absolutely unacceptable was the one regarding the unemployment insurance program. I am sure there are Liberal members on the other side who do not agree with what took place in 1996, but they were silent then. At the time in Atlantic Canada 31, out of 32 MPs were Liberal MPs. With 31 MPs on the government side, the government was able to pass a piece of legislation that out of the whole country most affected Atlantic Canadians. The 31 MPs were totally silent. They closed their eyes and supported their government. They did not care about the people of Atlantic Canada.

I started to listen to what was happening. I thought, there is something wrong here. We have an elected member of parliament on the government side. He is there. He has been an elected member for a long time. He actually stepped down and gave his place to the Prime Minister. The riding voted for him and gave him a one way ticket to Ottawa. I thought, why are those same people being punished for electing the Prime Minister and giving him his one way ticket to Ottawa.

I started questioning the MP. I asked him if he were not concerned. He indicated that they were abusing the system and that the system would have to be changed because there was too much abuse. He was saying this about the same people who were voting for him. I walked out of his office and I thought, my God, I have been voting for the wrong man all this time. He has no interest in defending my interests and the interests of the riding.

• (1830)

That is when I got involved and started to have public meetings. I organized coalitions. I told people that we had a problem, that we

Adjournment Debate

had elected a member of parliament whose sole interest in government was self-interest and that was it. I am not saying every member of the government is bad, because I know there are very nice people on that side, but he was our member of parliament and he should have been defending our interests and that did not happen.

What happened on June 2, 1999? The people asked me to run because actually I had been representing them for the last three years. Too many people were suffering and they asked me to run. I was a seasonal worker and I was going to run in an election. I could not imagine it would happen.

I am sure my time is almost over, but what I want to say is that people in Atlantic Canada are tired. They are not for sale. The bill will not buy their votes. They voiced their opinion on June 2, 1999. I will make sure that Atlantic Canadians, people from Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, be they from Albert county, Kent county or Westmorland, remember what the Liberals did to them in 1996.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure there is a question in the comment made by the member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, but there are a few things I can clarify.

First of all, Bill C-44, which was introduced by the Minister of Human Resources Development, is designed to help people. This bill is the result of the program evaluation process that took place in the maritime provinces and across Canada.

This process made us realize that we had to make some adjustments to help workers across Canada.

Bill C-44 brings necessary changes to the employment insurance program, changes that will benefit seasonal workers and millions more in Canada.

For example, the bill proposes the elimination of the intensity rule because it has not been effective and because, according to many, it is just a punitive measure. That is the first answer I can give the member.

Communities that depend on seasonal work will benefit from this new measure as they will benefit from other measures proposed in the bill.

I would like to add one basic element, namely, long term solutions. The government is looking for long term solutions. Solutions to the problems of seasonal workers call for more than what the employment insurance program can provide.

It is hard to say this, but it is the truth, because the solutions will require better co-operation among governments, businesses, community leaders and individuals so that we can improve job opportunities.

We know life is not easy in several regions of Canada, but that is something we have to really work on.

Gilbert Dumont is the chairman of the local committee on employment insurance in Charlevoix, a region in Quebec that relies a lot on seasonal work. On September 13, he said “We must look for lasting solutions to the unemployment problem in our region, instead of relying on employment insurance”.

He is right, and as I said earlier, in partnership with communities and businesses, we can solve this problem, which is a concern not only for the hon. member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac but also for the government.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.34 p.m.)

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