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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 1, 2001

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 1, 2001

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

• (1005)

[*English*]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed certain bills, to which the concurrence of this House is desired.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in order to provide to parliamentarians and Canadians information on the government's performance, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a report entitled "Managing for Results", and reports on the performance of 83 departments and agencies.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to table in the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association, which represented Canada at the fourth session of the year 2000 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, held in Strasbourg, France, from September 25 to 29, 2000.

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[*English*]

WHISTLE BLOWER HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-201, an act respecting the

protection of employees in the public service who make allegations in good faith respecting wrongdoing in the public service.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the bill is to protect the members of the Public Service of Canada who blow the whistle in good faith for wrongdoing in the public service, such as reports of waste, fraud, corruption, abuse of authority, violation of law or threats to public health or safety. The public interest is served when employees are free to make such reports without fear of retaliation and discrimination.

Therefore, I am very pleased to introduce my private member's bill, entitled an act respecting the protection of employees in the public service who make allegations in good faith respecting wrongdoing in the public service.

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

* * *

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS ACT

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-202, an act to amend the Statutory Instruments Act (disallowance procedure for statutory instruments).

He said: Mr. Speaker, my private member's bill, entitled an act to amend the Statutory Instruments Act, seeks to establish a statutory disallowance procedure for all statutory instruments that are subject to review and scrutiny by the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations, which I was co-chair in the last parliament. The bill will give teeth to the joint committee and will empower members of the House and the Senate to democratize our rights in parliament.

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

* * *

• (1010)

PETITIONS

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present another petition on behalf of Canadians who believe that the Government of Canada can deal more effectively with the more than 18,000 Canadians who suffer from end stage kidney disease.

The Address

The petitioners point out that those on kidney dialysis and those successfully transplanted recognize the importance of the bioartificial kidney as an alternative treatment. They call upon parliament to work and support the bioartificial kidney, which will eventually eliminate the need for both dialysis or transplantations in those suffering from kidney disease.

Mr. Paul DeVillers (Simcoe North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I have the pleasure of presenting a petition containing 135 signatures of people primarily from Simcoe county.

They petition parliament to work and support the bioartificial kidney, which will eventually eliminate the need for both dialysis or transplantation for those suffering from kidney disease.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that Canada has a long history of recognizing the rights of freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, the petitioners lament the fact that health care workers and those seeking training for a career in the health care system have been stripped of those rights by medical facilities and educational institutes.

They refer to examples of some hospitals where nurses are forced to assist in abortion procedures against their deeply held religious and moral convictions. That is now happening in respect of pharmacies too.

In view of the fact that some nurses have lost jobs due to their adherence to religious and moral beliefs, they call upon parliament to enact legislation against such violations of conscience rights by administrators of medical and educational facilities.

* * *

[Translation]

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 the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from January 31 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wish to advise you that all members of the Canadian Alliance will be sharing time during the remainder of this debate.

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me take this opportunity to join with many of my colleagues in congratulating you, Sir, on your election as Speaker. Let me assure you that I will always abide by the wisdom of your rulings and seek in speedy fashion to comply with your direction to me.

My next words are words of thanks to the voters of Bonavista—Trinity—Conception who have allowed me the privilege, and it is a real privilege for all of us to be here, of coming back to parliament having been absent from this very special place for the last five years.

There is no question that having the right and, more important, having the responsibility to speak and to participate in the debates in this place is one that few Canadians are given the opportunity to do. As the member of parliament for Bonavista—Trinity—Conception the second time around, I have a special awareness of what a great honour this is.

My duty today is to speak in support of the Speech from the Throne. I do so as Minister of Industry and as somebody who is tremendously excited to be in that role. The Prime Minister has asked me to take on these duties, and I am doing so with great enthusiasm. I say that because I reflect back on where Canada has come since the first time I sat in this place in 1980, nearly 21 years ago this month.

● (1015)

Our country has changed enormously in those 21 years. I remember the debates of the early 1980s in which we talked about the protection, enhancement and promotion of Canada primarily but not exclusively as a resource based economy. We talked about our capacity in the manufacturing area, primarily about our industrial might and muscle in southern Ontario. We talked about the structured arrangements under the auto pact which gave possibility or potential to that manufacturing might.

The Address

We talked about our position vis-à-vis our neighbour to the south as being that of a much smaller player, one-tenth the size. Indeed, the cliché was coined, shaped and nurtured back then that when the U.S. got the sniffles we got pneumonia.

How much has changed since 1980? We no longer think of our southern neighbour as a colossus that might inadvertently in the middle of the night roll over and lay waste to Canada and all of our aspirations. Rather, we see our neighbour to the south as a tremendous market of opportunity, as a place that we can penetrate successfully and compete with and win in on a fair playing field with the quality of our products.

Let those who come from the so-called old economy, such as our farmers, compete on a fair playing field. The farmers of Canada can compete and win in any marketplace in the world today.

A fair opportunity to compete is what is being asked for, whether it be our fishermen, our mining industry or our foresters. Soon we will be talking about softwood lumber and fair access for that product in the marketplace to the south.

What has changed in the last 20 or 21 years is the way in which Canada has become an innovative society. In that regard it is important to recognize the leadership that this country and the government has had from two individuals who I want to single out.

In particular, I pay tribute to the tremendous leadership of my predecessor as Minister of Industry, the current Minister of Foreign Affairs, who has been very forward looking in the kind of stewardship he brought to the Department of Industry. I intend to continue with the road map that he has very much drafted.

I also recognize the vision and the leadership that the Prime Minister has brought to this agenda as well, because at the end of the day big change can only come with strong and visionary leadership.

What have we done? We have shifted our capability for wealth creation beyond our considerable natural resource sectors. Those remain important and will always be important. We have learned to create wealth from the power of our ideas, from the scope of our imagination, and purely from our will to win, by being better than most others in areas of the knowledge and information based economy.

How have we done that? We have done it by making substantial new investments in our people, a very important resource in the new economy. We have created a tax environment that makes Canada an attractive location for smart and skilled people to come to and stay in to give of their skills in creating wealth that can be exported all over the world. I refer to the tremendous work of the Minister of Finance in bringing forward a budget a few months ago that read and anticipated very well the state of play in the economy in North America.

We have today a debate about whether or not the downturn in the U.S. economy will be soft, hard, long lasting or short term, but whatever the circumstances at the end of the day, and we believe it

will be managed and measured south of the border, whatever the state of play, Canada is tremendously well positioned to absorb, ride out and recover quickly from whatever adjustment we see south of the border.

That is not by accident, but by smart and good planning. In that regard the House owes as well a special recognition and a vote of thanks to the Minister of Finance for his stewardship of Canada's economy.

● (1020)

Exactly a month ago on January 1 Canadians received the first \$17 billion down payment on a five year \$100 billion tax cut. This is not some kind of theological tax cut, one that is driven out of some misplaced ideology. This is not money that is borrowed from our children. This is money that is surplus to our accounts because of solid stewardship of Canada's finances. It leaves dollars and cents in the pockets of Canadians who are able to use those dollars and cents to contribute to the health of the Canadian economy.

Beyond that tax cut for our citizens, 52% of which goes to Canadians making \$60,000 a year or less, we have also positioned ourselves very well with cuts to the capital gains and with new treatment of the rollover of stock and stock options, which encourage investment in the country.

There are other areas of solid investment that the Government of Canada announced in the throne speech. We have announced that Canada is not satisfied with being competitive in the area of research and development. Canada wants to leap ahead.

The government has committed to a doubling of R and D over the next 10 years. We want to move Canada to among the top five of the OECD in research and development. We understand that when we nurture and support our best minds, our scientists and centres of excellence all across the country, we nurture and support the kinds of ideas that ultimately are commercialized and bring ideas and services to the marketplace of the world. That has been a great success for the country.

It has been said before but it bears repeating: the Government of Canada is committed to 2,000 research chairs at Canadian institutions. Someone might ask what that means and how it compares with the status quo. Canada had 169 research chairs in all of our universities prior to the Prime Minister committing to 2,000 new chairs over five years, 400 more chairs a year for five years, built on a base of 169 to this point, all across Canada. We are reaching out to and supporting those who can build the new economy.

We have invested \$160 million in Genome Canada. We have established the most generous R and D tax regime in the world today. I am speaking not just to our own citizens and corporations but to citizens around the world who are looking for stable, smart environments in which to invest in R and D in the country. For those who qualify for the full range of measures for R and D, it may cost no more than 35 cents on a dollar.

The Address

Canadians have heard repeatedly that the Internet means the death of distance. That is a well used and well worn phrase. It is one that entices and invites those who live in far flung locations in this broad and vast country to believe that they can participate on the Internet, that they can have access from a leisure, pleasure and business point of view to all of the opportunities of the Internet. However, it is not true.

The Internet of and by itself is not the death of distance. There is a new phrase to which we should pay attention. It is called the digital divide: the division between those who have access to high speed, affordable, reliable broadband service and those who do not. For those living in rural, remote, western, northern or Atlantic communities, merely getting online is not good enough.

The vision of the Government of Canada is this: getting online with a service that is fast, efficient, affordable and reliable, one that can handle the content available today on the web and that allows us to improve the quality of our lives or to market our goods, services and products over the Internet. The government has announced that Canada will seek to ensure that by 2004 every community will be online with high speed broadband service.

● (1025)

Not since a government committed to using bands of steel to pull the country together in some measure of equality of opportunity has a government been so committed to a public infrastructure project which ensures that when it comes to the new economy, no Canadian, no matter where she or he may live, is left behind. This too is part of our vision of participating in the new economy.

In short, Canada is an innovative country. Canada is a country of individuals whose commitment is second to none in regard to improving the quality of life of their fellow citizens and innovating in a way that improves the quality of life of citizens all over the world.

Part of our mission and our challenge in the months and years ahead is to tell the Canadian story, to re-brand the country. Part of it is to help those beyond our borders recognize that while we are proud to be associated with the vistas found on Prince Edward Island, on the prairies, in the Rockies, on the coastline of British Columbia or indeed on the magnificent coastline of Bonavista—Trinity—Conception, or with the pleasures of enjoying the ice sculptures in Ottawa at this time of year, or as my friend has just reminded me, with the wonderful new development of Toronto's Harbourfront, we also have to ensure that Canada is recognized for its tremendous technical ability as well.

That is why in March or April, with a special source of pride, Canadians will be watching with some fascination the hand off that occurs when the Canadarm aboard the shuttle spacecraft lifts out of

the cargo bay. It is what we will call for the moment Canadarm 2. That instrument will move, shift and facilitate the construction of the space lab project.

Fifteen nations from all over the world will be collaborating to put men, equipment and technology in space to open new frontiers, but the hand off that occurs to make all of that possible is a Canadarm out of the shuttle storage container passing off to a Canadarm 2, which will be permanently based on that space lab and which will facilitate the construction, development, maintenance and operation of this incredible international project.

That is the measure and symbol of Canadian technology: one hand passing off to the next hand a new generation of expertise. That is the message we want to bring to the world. In short, the country has much of which we can be proud, and we intend to grow our capacity.

Let me close by saying that it is not by accident Canada became the first country in the world where every school is connected to the Internet. I remember the great debate between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole in which Bob Dole said that his vision for the future was to try to recreate an America of his youth, of the fifties. That vision had some attractive concepts.

President Clinton said that his vision of the future, his bridge to the future, was to see that every school in America got online by 2000. I thought that was a fine declaration since Canada got there first. Forgive me if I point out that Newfoundland got there in 1995.

We can, we will and we must tap the power, the capacity and the imagination of all the young minds and of all the experienced researchers of this country to build a new economy, to compete, to improve our own quality of life, and to make our contribution to the quality of life of citizens all over the world.

● (1030)

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is an extreme honour for me to have the chance to respond to the hon. member's comments and to elaborate on a couple of aspects which are of concern, particularly to the people in my riding and to people nationally.

The member spoke in glowing terms about his own riding. It was obvious the love he feels for it and his province. I feel the same way about my own riding and my country. He spoke of generations of expertise and of the concerns that he and his government have for the future and for the expertise we all want to see rise up inside our children in order for them to capture their potential.

Those are wonderful words and quite true. He also spoke of fair treatment, and that is of concern right now to many of my constituents and many farm families who have for generations

done their best to adapt and to succeed. Right now they are facing a set of circumstances, largely not of their own making, that pose tremendous challenges to them.

As the minister knows, the level playing field we subscribe to and would like to see for all industries in all sectors of our economy does not exist for agriculture. That level playing field is something we desire to see. Until we see it, the unlevel playing field is largely in an uphill direction for our agricultural producers. The slope becomes ever steeper and causes many to fall and tumble downhill.

As farmers leave the industry, depopulation follows. Fewer and fewer people reside on the farmlands of our country. We are allowing other countries, which value their agricultural industries very highly through policies of subsidization, to shape the policies of this country. This government has adopted a policy of rural depopulation, which severely impacts on all of us who are thinking about the future as much, as the minister has alluded to, as his government apparently is thinking about the future.

Recently the minister made the decision to subsidize the aerospace industry through the tax dollars of Canadians. Knowing that was a difficult decision for him, has the minister considered that Brazil, through its own policies of reprisal against Canada for this decision, will very likely reduce its purchases of grain from Canada? Has he considered that the very people who have not been favoured by such subsidies by our government, the agricultural producers of our land, will be the most disaffected now and the most penalized by the decisions the Brazilian government will make?

Hon. Brian Tobin: Mr. Speaker, let me assure the member for Portage—Lisgar that I and members on this side of the House share his very great concern for the plight and the position of Canadian farmers today.

I know we are not supposed to talk outside of our privileged dialogue in caucus, but I think I would be forgiven if I revealed that this has been a major preoccupation of members on this side of the House. Whether it is in caucus, in cabinet or in cabinet committees, we too are concerned with the plight of farmers.

The blunt reality is that the state and health of our farmers and farm community is not something that is isolated just to the farm community. The farm community is a very important one. It is felt right across the country. Indeed my colleague just reminded me that as many as one in six jobs in urban settings are directly affected by the health and the success of our farm community.

There is no question that Canada must do everything it can to effectively assist our farmers to make the case for a fair and level playing field. The member just asked me if I was aware of the consequence of taking measures to assist Bombardier in response

The Address

to four WTO rulings, that Brazil might respond in a way that would cause further harm to some members of the Canadian agricultural community. That is a fair question to ask and something that we will obviously watch and pay very close attention to as we attempt to get Brazil to comply with WTO rulings.

• (1035)

We need to remind Canadians that in the case of Brazil and Embraer, the competitor for the regional jet market, there has not been one compliance. I do not come from a part of the country where Bombardier has a presence. I do not come from a part of the country where I expect any time soon that Bombardier will have a presence. There is no substantial play for the moment in my part of the country associated with these contracts. I am speaking purely as a Canadian and as the Minister of Industry looking at the following facts.

I make the case to my fellow Canadians on the farms that we have had not one but four WTO rulings which indicate that Brazil has been acting in an unfair manner and offering unfair subsidies. We have also lost a very substantial market share as a result of these unfair trade practices. Against that backdrop, Canada can do nothing for fear of criticism that we are helping one sector. It may cause problems for others. There may be a bite. We can let the industry go, 95,000 jobs, or we can respond.

My question to the member would be, is it his position that the government ought not to have acted on the position of his party with respect to Bombardier? Is it his position now that we should withdraw because there may be a dispute and, if there is a dispute, there may be others that will be put at risk? If that is his position, as the spokesperson for the opposition he is certainly entitled to say it. I would be very interested in hearing from him.

The Speaker: I had hoped that we could make the questions and comments a little shorter when there are so many members who wish to ask questions.

Hon. Brian Tobin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would ask if colleagues opposite would consider allowing a brief response because I think it is important that we know whether or not parliament is of like mind on such a fundamental issue as this one.

The Speaker: It is reasonable to share the questions and comments but I am sure the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar will have an opportunity to make a speech later in the debate.

[Translation]

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to put a question to the new Minister of Industry, whom I congratulate on his appointment.

The Address

He alluded to the history of the Canadian model and, as he was a member of parliament back in 1993, I would remind him that during the 1993 election campaign the Liberals had promised a shipbuilding policy.

As a former provincial premier, the minister surely remembers that, on two occasions, he and his counterparts, had asked the federal government to develop a shipbuilding policy. On October 20, he even organized, as a former premier of Newfoundland, a meeting with the other premiers of the Atlantic provinces to deal with shipbuilding. He attended that meeting as the Minister of Industry and, at the time, set up a committee that was to table a report by the end of January, in order to take quick action.

Now that he has been re-elected and is the Minister of Industry, does he remember the commitments that he made in October and will he act quickly to adopt a new policy very soon? This is extremely urgent. The minister is very familiar with the issue, since there are several shipyards in his riding, even though one of them has shut down, if I am not mistaken.

When will the minister announce the true shipbuilding policy that he promised?

[*English*]

Hon. Brian Tobin: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his representation with respect to the issue of shipbuilding. I also thank him for recognizing that I was the premier of the province that organized a forum. It was the first forum organized in some time that allowed provincial government representatives, four premiers, six or seven different provinces, the private sector and the unions to come together in one place to talk about shipbuilding.

• (1040)

One of the great ironies was that I sent out the invitations as premier and I attended the shipbuilding conferences as Minister of Industry.

A couple of points that came out of that conference. I think the member knows very well that it was a very positive and constructive meeting.

First, we recognized Canada as the largest maritime nation in the world.

Second, it was inconceivable to all of those who attended that meeting that Canada should lose its ship repair and shipbuilding capabilities. It simply makes no sense that we would not remain in the sector.

Third, there was no solution around the notion of arbitrarily reaching out and subsidizing a yard here or a project here or a ship there. That was a consensus. I know the member is on record as saying that he agrees with that consensus.

Fourth, we had to find innovative ways. The member put forward a bill in the last parliament that had a menu of items which were considered innovative ways of making the sector more competitive and smarter. That does not mean doing things the old way. It does not even necessarily mean doing the old work.

A case in point is the yard in Newfoundland which is no longer building ships or employing shipyard workers. They are building topside modules for offshore oil and gas. They have brought in new skills, new technology and new training.

When will we respond? The committee will report in the middle of February. I need to study that report. The member would not want me to act in advance of hearing the advice of those who are so committed to the sector.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be splitting my time this morning with my colleague from Yellowhead. He is the deputy critic in the Canadian Alliance health portfolio. He has an extensive background of sitting on hospital boards and of chairing a regional health authority.

On the critic team is the member for Nanaimo—Alberni who has extensive experience in complementary medicine. We are proud to have a very strong health component to Canadian Alliance policy making. I am the chief critic for the health portfolio.

I think we have all had experience with the Canadian health care system. My own experience has been more extensive than I would like. One example is very much on my mind now because it is a bit of an anniversary. Several years ago I had a call from my mother to tell me that she had been diagnosed with colon cancer. She passed away around this time some years ago after two years of struggling with her cancer.

One of the things that stands out for me during that time was the visits I paid to her on the weekend. We lived several hours away and so I would go with my little daughter to see mom on the weekends. I remember the care that she received in the hospital in northern Alberta.

The nurses were beyond kind. They always had her hair fixed. I remember how they would put a little flower on her nightgown when we would come to visit so that she would be ready for her family. It was care far beyond technology. It meant a lot to my mom and to her family.

When we talk about health care sometimes we talk too much about dollars and cents, clinics, technology, numbers, pay levels, and maybe not enough about the spirit that should animate the health care system: the caring and the compassion that contribute so much to peace of mind, as much I would say as medicine, technology, and keeping good charts.

Canadians value their health care system. It goes beyond the mechanics of it.

• (1045)

It is something that Canadians believe needs to be there for people to sustain them, to support them, and to meet their needs in a compassionate way when medical tragedy strikes.

Canadians want the peace of mind of knowing they have a strong, top notch health care system. Canadians want prompt, quality care, from a fair system that depends not on a person's financial status but on his or her medical needs.

Canadians take pride in a health system that has reflected our values of neighbourliness and sharing risk and being there for each other.

Canadians want leaders who are committed enough to deliver the fair, prompt, quality health care they need for peace of mind and to meet the requirements of care when health problems arise.

Maclean's magazine does an annual year end poll. At the end of December *Maclean's* surveyed Canadians about their attitudes toward our health system. The latest survey showed that health care had lost ground in the past quarter century. This concern has topped the *Maclean's* year end survey for two years.

Canadians increasingly believe that many of our country's key social institutions, including hospitals, are broke and need fixing. Restoring health care clearly tops the list for Canadians, with a full 35% of Canadians surveyed saying this is Canada's biggest problem.

A national health care survey last June disclosed that 82% of Canadians believe there are too few doctors and nurses in our system, the most fundamental health care providers.

Seventy-seven per cent of respondents believe the system will face increasing demands from an aging population. Seventy-six per cent believe there is inadequate government funding. Seventy per cent say the health system lacks accountability to the public on how money is spent. Seventy per cent say there is not enough modern diagnostic equipment like MRIs.

A headline in yesterday's newspaper said that in Ontario alone there is a backlog of up to 12,000 people a year in one province awaiting MRIs.

Fifty-eight per cent believe that there are not enough hospitals. Nearly half those polled believe there is not enough use of modern information technology such as electronic patient records.

It is clear that Canadians are looking for some leadership in addressing these issues. In the short time my deputies and I have worked on this portfolio we have identified five key issues that we believe must be addressed. There may be more, but this is a start.

The Address

First is the issue of how to ensure that prompt, quality health care as defined by measurable standards is available to Canadians when they need essential medical services both in the immediate and the long term future.

The second issue is how to ensure adequate resources for health care, including infrastructure technology and trained medical service providers.

Third, is there any role for provision and/or funding of essential medical services other than by the state, and if so, what role?

The fourth is how to ensure responsible use of health care resources, both by health care users and health care providers.

Fifth, what is the most effective balance of responsibilities among the federal and the provincial governments in overseeing our health care system?

• (1050)

If we worked together in a non-partisan way to address these key issues, Canadians would go along away toward being satisfied that the leadership from their elected officials was moving in the right direction.

The government has not had a reassuring record on health care. It slashed huge amounts of funding several years ago and agreed to put the money back only under pressure of a looming election.

That means that in a year or two health care funding will be back to where it was in 1994-95. It is a back to the future approach to health care funding by the federal government. It will clearly not meet the needs and anxieties of Canadians.

The throne speech earlier this week spent about two of its forty-five minutes on health care. This is an issue that 35% of Canadians put at the top of their list of concerns. There seems to be a disconnect between the government and the needs of Canadians.

The Canadian Alliance has decided to step back and re-examine the health care issue. We have set up a task force which will consult with health care users, providers and experts. I will visit a couple of European countries that I think have something to teach us. I will talk with experts there to see what they feel works and does not work, lessons we may be able to apply here. We will also invite input and advice from Canadians across the country.

We believe if we work together we can make real strides in addressing the health care concerns of Canadians. The Canadian Alliance wants and intends to be part of the solution and we look forward very much to that work.

The Address

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to stand here today to speak on behalf of the people of my riding of Yellowhead.

I begin by thanking everyone who helped in my campaign and by thanking as well the voters of Yellowhead for placing me in such great confidence. I speak on their behalf and that is a great privilege.

Most important, though, I thank my wife Brenda, my two sons Chad and Scott, my daughter-in-law Joanne and the rest of my loving family for their support.

It is not without some sadness that I stand to reply to the throne speech with regard to health care. I was disappointed that the government did not have any real vision or solutions for Canada. Instead, this caretaker government recycled the same old ideas that have robbed Canada of its status as a country of influence for many years.

I had hoped that the Liberal legacy of broken promises, arrogance, waste, patronage and secrecy would have finally been replaced by tax relief, justice reform and stable health care.

We need a government that understands Canadians and responds to their concerns, and I am disappointed. Canadians want a government with practical solutions, ready to tackle big issues like health care.

The root problems in health care were ignored in the Speech from the Throne. It maintained the status quo. Provincial and federal relationships over the past years have deteriorated to an all time low, so much so that they cannot be repaired under the present government.

Sir John A. Macdonald, the visionary of Canada and Confederation, foresaw the conflicts that would happen between competing governments in our diverse and vast land. In the Confederation debate of 1864 he called for a constitution that would avoid all conflicts of jurisdiction and authority. Clear lines were established on issues such as health care.

• (1055)

The adversarial approach of the Liberal government in dealing with the provinces has become a very large part of the problem. The Canadian Alliance is committed to working with the stakeholders under the provisions of the Canada Health Act to come up with practical, long term solutions.

Unfortunately the government has more interest in provoking a fight with the provinces than in building constructive solutions based on consensus. The adversarial approach taken by the federal government must come to an end. We must start working together collaboratively.

The Liberals claim to be the protectors of health care. That is interesting because history paints a different story for me. They

began their reign in 1993 by ripping the guts out of the health care system and trying to balance the books on the back of that system. Their across the board cuts went against the original 50:50 funding arrangements with the provinces.

They not only removed the dollars but insisted on influencing things outside the Canada Health Act. The actions in 1993 have had long lasting effects on the health care system, none of which are positive. Long term planning has been neglected. Our aging population will challenge our system beyond anything we have seen at present. The status quo means certain collapse of a strained health care system.

The neglect since 1993 has left Canada behind in infrastructure technology and the training of medical service providers. An example was the threat of a shutdown of a seniors facility this month because of a nursing shortage in rural communities. Forty-two seniors were about to be displaced. Forty-two may not sound like a lot, but when one's whole life is shrunk down to four walls and a photo album that kind of change is devastating.

This is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the stories about the pending problems in health care that we will be told across the country. We need a government that will recognize the impact of the aging baby boomer generation on the system.

The throne speech boasts of a fall agreement with the provinces to put back \$21 billion over a five year period. This is not new money for health care. Even though the program was introduced in last fall's parliament, the reality is that the funding which sustained the system in 1994 will not be reached until March 2002.

The government could have shown real leadership by putting this money to work today. However, not one nickel of that \$21 billion will hit the system until April 1 of this year, and then it will be spread over a five year period.

This is not only about dollars and cents. The survival of the health care system requires a comprehensive shift in accountability. Users and providers need to be more aware of and accountable for how health care dollars are spent.

I speak from personal experience. I have dealt with the health care system in Alberta as a member of the health board and regional authorities for the past 15 years. I have dealt with the administration of the health system on a daily basis. I understand the fears Canadians are feeling. The government must look at the real issues facing the health care system.

Health care is not the only issue affecting Yellowhead. My constituents are also very concerned about what is happening in agriculture. The government must fight to protect the agricultural system which is the backbone of the country.

I feel the pain and the frustration of those who drove their tractors to Parliament Hill this week. I also fear that my son, who is

the fourth generation to farm our land north of Whitecourt, may be the last because it makes little economic sense to stay on the family farm today.

Why should farmers believe the government has their best interest in mind? Real leadership would have come if the government had fought against unfair foreign subsidies when it came to power in 1993 and not today.

Skyrocketing input costs and low commodity prices will mean an end to the family farm as we know it. Canadian farmers are the most efficient in the world and a vital part of our economy. The government must make a firm commitment to protect them and do so now.

Yellowhead is a diverse riding, relying on agriculture, tourism, and resources like timber and coal which are going through difficult times as well. Current economic policies have driven the dollar to the point where we are selling our raw resources at fire sale prices. Energy costs are also destroying small businesses across the riding.

The federal government must take the lead in ensuring the crisis does not lead to economic disaster. We need a government that sets an optimistic tone for the future, not one that is looking for a legacy. True legacies are built, not bought.

• (1100)

I have another concern that I must address immediately. It is the issue of self-governance in the town of Jasper, which is a community of 4,000 plus individuals nestled into the national park. All Canadians should look at this issue and question the value a government places on democracy and accountability.

Jasper has asked for the ability to govern its own municipal affairs. There are numerous examples of bureaucratic nightmares which I can cite. An example that comes to mind is the new fire truck that Jasper received. It was ordered by bureaucrats 3,000 miles away. The fire truck is too big to fit in the fire hall. This has left the town's emergency services in some doubt because the truck sits outside in the cold.

Jasper also continues to discharge raw sewage into the pristine headwaters of the Rocky Mountains, resulting in a cumbersome bureaucracy unable to make reasonable decisions.

These are municipal matters. Democracy and accountability must be granted to the community of Jasper.

I am disappointed in the lack of vision that the government has set out for Canada. I believe this country has absolutely unbelievable potential. I am sorry to say that after hearing the government's plans in the Speech from the Throne, I will have to tell the people of Yellowhead that the ship remains adrift and it is going to be a very long three and a half years.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent overview of health issues in the country.

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Because of his background in the regional health authority in his home province, I would like to ask the member what he believes the federal government could or should do and what its highest priorities should be to strengthen and address the concerns of Canadians in our health care system?

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, health care is absolutely the number one priority for the people who walk the streets of our country. We are identified as Canadians by our health care and it is absolutely the most precious thing for us. Accountability must be there by the users and the providers of the system if we are going to sustain that system. It is absolutely important that we see that as priority one.

Mr. Grant Hill (Macleod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his maiden speech.

In 1993 we were told that there was a huge deficit in the country. The Liberals chose to cut funding for health care as one of their priorities. I felt that was a mistake in priority and thought that possibly areas such as HRDC grants and contributions could have gone down so health care could have been preserved.

From the member's perspective would he share the belief that there were other areas that could have been cut to reduce the deficit rather than in our health care system?

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, health care is priority number one for Canadians. That is absolutely essential. To have the government reduce the funding so radically and take such an adversarial approach in doing it is unconstitutional. I do not understand how it can do that and live with itself.

I understand that with the constraints in the budget the government had to reduce. However, there was no collaboration. That destroyed the relationship between the provinces and the federal government and stepped over bounds. The repercussions of that decision have yet to come home to roost.

Mrs. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations to you. To my colleagues around the floor of the House, I pledge my respect for their opinions and pledge that I will work with them toward the goal that I believe will create a better Canada for all of our constituents. I believe we come here with the same goals in our heads and in our hearts.

This is my third time in the House and I want to take the time to thank my husband John and my children Amanda, Devon and John Anthony.

By necessity all of us share our energy and our time. We know we always give our love to our families, but they share in our geographical separations that are occasioned by our work in the House and across this land.

The Address

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

It is a great pleasure and honour to be here among you. I am greatly honoured. Like all the other members of this House, I am learning my second official language. I am studying with a good teacher.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, I am sharing time with the member for Scarborough East.

I am well aware that the historical significance of having two founding nations sharing this land with our aboriginal peoples is the prime significance in the development, the history and the future of this country.

The inclusiveness I heard spoken in the Speech from the Throne and the response by our Prime Minister is at the heart of everything we should be looking toward when our setting our goals and plans. Social and economic ideas have to be integrated taking into account the real life of our constituents.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the constituents in London West who voted for me, as well as those who did not. I work on their behalf everyday and will continue to do so.

We all come here with special interests. My special interest since 1993 has been research and the economic development that has resulted.

When we formed the government in 1993, Canada's record was not good nationally or internationally. There were valid reasons. The state of our economy, the debt and the deficit were very real inhibitors. I am grateful that we have now set a very realistic goal of being among the top five in the developed world for allocating research dollars. I realize that not only will government have to invest research dollars into its own operations, but it will have to invest in our universities and industries so they can share in this very important endeavour.

Not only shall we be doing the basic science research, research which will translate into jobs and products, we will also need a trained workforce. With a department like Human Resources Development, we will be there for those people who are striving to learn. Over the past number of years we also put in place a number of plans. We now have the registered education plan which will allow people to take time out from their working life to retrain and update skills so they can more fully participate in their communities and take care of their families.

I am especially pleased that we have targeted special programs that have tested well already in certain jurisdictions. There is a need to help single parents. Sharing wealth and opportunity is very

worthwhile, which is the theme of the throne speech. It is necessary for us to share this with our communities.

Last term I spent some time in the aboriginal affairs committee. I am very pleased that we are further looking at governance and inclusion. We will be putting hope and dollars back on the table so people can advance.

I have been in regions where young children have to separate from their families at the high school level to finish their early years of education. I am not talking about university or college, or a separation for a week or a day. I am talking about separation for a term. The infrastructure is not on site. Family nurturing cannot be done in the home.

I am aware that in the aboriginal community money is not always available to every person who is ready for post-secondary education. It comes parcelled from our federal government. We are looking for leaders in all of our communities but these leaders need tools. One of the basic tools, and I think all members in the House would agree, is an education.

• (1110)

People need housing. In the aboriginal communities there is a vast need to share housing dollars. They also need clean water. There are communities in Canada that do not have clean, accessible water. A lot of those are aboriginal communities. This is not right.

I think we understand the problems. In the document "Gathering Strength", the government mapped out a long term solution. I am very happy and would be very willing, as I hope all members of the House and the broader Canadian public would be, to see an expansion of this very necessary work. This would enable us to hold ourselves proud together with our brothers and sisters in Canada and say that one community can strive for the same amenities that other communities have like public health and public access to the educational needs.

I will speak about our children. It is a cliché to say that our children are our future, but we help shape that future. The provinces have the primary responsibility for education. However, through an agreement with them, we are partners in those programs. We have assisted in many ways and will continue to assist.

Most employment statistics show that over half of the employees in Canada will need in excess of a secondary level of education. We need a very trained workforce. All communities need access to it.

I am very grateful that we are continuing to put money into our Internet access in urban communities. I understand the Minister of Industry will be handing out more. Seniors will have access to the Internet. I am also very pleased that our children will now have

The Address

access and the capability to obtain knowledge in the new economy which many of us are striving for that in middle life.

The Speech from the Throne and our response signalled that our banking community will get the tools it needs with the legislation that hopefully will be placed before us again. That resolution will help Canada's economy modernize and be competitive in a global environment.

When I knocked on the doors of my constituents during my campaign for re-election, I was surprised that many people had put the environment at the front burner of their thoughts. They said it was worth spending money on. In the past environment was not my top issue. Today I am concerned about my health. I am concerned about clean water, clean air and the pollution from our industries and across our borders.

The value of forests and the value of sustainable development is also important. People have been talking intensely about this for many years but it did not gather public support. People had not related to the fact that an endangered species perhaps needs the same things we need to live and survive. We know now because we are a species sharing this environment.

I applaud the government for going ahead on the environment, on the health needs of our population, on research and on the new economy. I would be remiss to say that I did not applaud or fully support the economic development increase going to the global community. We share the world and we have a responsibility to share its resources and, where necessary, extend a helping hand.

We will have many opportunities over the next few years to debate these issues in the House. I wish all of my colleagues well in their work. I pledge to you, Mr. Speaker and the other members sitting in your chair, my co-operation and respect.

Mr. John McKay (Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election. I am absolutely confident that you will make a fair minded and wonderful Speaker.

I also want to thank the electors of Scarborough East for returning me to this Chamber to offer their views on these important issues.

• (1115)

A throne speech is really only a document that gives direction. It is necessarily less specific than some would wish. However, Canadians should really only see the throne speech as a book with a number of chapters to follow. I will comment on one of those chapters which deals with strong and safe communities.

Until now Canada has enjoyed a relatively buoyant economy. Interest rates are relatively low. People's real incomes are rising. We have reduced the national debt and interest rates are down.

The level of prosperity may or may not continue. Some say that it will not. However, with the prudent assumptions of the government we are hopeful that our buoyant economy will return. We are much better positioned to weather a downturn in the economy if and when it comes. For the time being, we can still dream dreams and address some of the pressing needs of our people.

Yesterday I listened to the Leader of the Opposition in his reply to the Speech from the Throne. He was talking tough on crime. He went on to talk about how criminals seem to have all the rights and that victims do not have any.

I would like to take the opportunity to correct the mistaken impression that the Leader of the Opposition may have unintentionally left, namely that criminals have all the rights. All Canadians enjoy exactly the same rights when faced with a criminal offence.

It is simple minded rhetoric to say that criminals have all the rights and victims have none. All Canadians are presumed innocent. All Canadians have the right not to self-incriminate. All Canadians have the right to present a full defence. All Canadians have the right to have the crown prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt. Those rights, among many others, are enjoyed by all Canadians charged with any crime and therefore, in my view, it does a disservice to victims to speak of victims' rights and criminal rights in a cheap rhetorical flourish.

It is a pity that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has not reviewed the work of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights from the last parliament. Had he reviewed the work of the committee he would have come across Bill C-79, commonly called the victims' rights bill. The genesis of that bill was in the committee's report called, "Victims: A Voice not a Veto". The report was unanimously put forward to the House by all members, of which one of his members, particularly the member for Surrey North, made a significant contribution.

The bill arose out of that report and was introduced into the House. It came back before the committee and was quickly returned to the House because it incorporated many of the suggestions contained in the report. I have yet to hear any person who represents victims that advocates that the bill is substantively flawed in any way.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition would also have been interested in the work of the committee on drunk driving. Again an all-party committee produced the bill, which, among other things, substantially increased the penalties for drunk driving. His own members contributed to the drafting of the bill. The Minister of Justice was gracious enough to introduce the bill into the House because she was persuaded of its merits. Included in the bill was a potential life sentence for those convicted of drunk driving a third time; three strikes and they would be gone.

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I do not think it can be tougher without getting into issues of disproportionality. On this side of the House we are plenty tough on crime. We are not so foolish, however, as to skewer the entire system of justice and the criminal code just to show how tough we really are. If he still wishes to be tough he should look at the committee report on organized crime. Our report was very detailed on how we as a committee felt that organized crime should be dealt with. I was pleased to see that the Speech from the Throne picked up on that issue. It said:

The Government will focus on safeguarding Canadians from new and emerging forms of crime. It will take aggressive steps to combat organized crime, including the creation of stronger anti-gang laws and measures to protect members of the justice system from intimidation.

I, for one, look forward to the opportunity to review our initial work on organized crime and spend time making suggestions to the government with respect to specific amendments to the criminal code and enhancements to the authority of police officers and people in the justice system.

• (1120)

Justice is more than just getting tough. Any fool can be tough, and we may even have some examples in the House. Justice is far more subtle than just merely being tough. A society that incarcerates aboriginals at rates vastly disproportionate to the rest of the population is a society that must look itself in the mirror.

I remember questioning a judge from the Northwest Territories, a former professor of mine at Queen's University, who was gracious enough to come before the committee on Bill C-3. I asked him about the disproportionate incarceration rates of aboriginal youth. His answer was ultimately quite sad. Tragically many justices incarcerate aboriginal youth because they have no real alternatives. Youth homes are either dysfunctional or do not exist at all.

The thinking is that throwing the kid in jail is actually doing him a favour. I submit that this is the brutal indictment of our own society. The throne speech read:

It is a tragic reality that too many Aboriginal people are finding themselves in conflict with the law. Canada must take the measures needed to significantly reduce the percentage of Aboriginal people entering the criminal justice system.

I agree with the throne speech and the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has set a generation bar of 20 years to reduce the number of aboriginals in conflict with our criminal justice system.

I have said that justice is more than just getting tough. Justice means that there will be a sentence after a conviction, not before as some would like. When that sentence is served the convicted person will return to the street, with the exception of those serving life sentences.

Everyone returns to the street some day. One way or another they will return to us, to society, to their communities and to their families. Getting tough by throwing someone in jail, walking away

and throwing away the proverbial key creates a lifetime criminal. Since everyone returns to society some time, we either manage the reintegration and rehabilitation or just walk away and leave the criminal to make out as best he or she can. I prefer a system which stands beside the person on the way to completing his or her sentence.

Getting tough with rehabilitation and reintegration is just plain stupid. It is in society's best interest to try to assist individuals so that recidivism rates will be reduced. If an offender is let back on the streets a bit at a time, it only makes sense that the chances of him or her returning to a lifetime of crime are reduced, rather than simply pitching the criminal over the proverbial walls of the jail and hoping that he or she makes out and saying in effect "You are on your own, buddy".

I look forward to the Minister of Justice following up on the commitment in the Speech from the Throne to reintroduce the youth justice bill, which will:

—encourage alternatives to custody for non-violent offenders, emphasizing rehabilitation and reintegration into society, while toughening consequences for more violent youth.

In closing, any fool can be tough. Being tough on crime is merely a rhetorical flourish, but it is far more difficult to be just. The record of the 36th parliament showed us getting tough on drunk driving, getting tough by taking DNA samples from certain convicted criminals, getting tough on organized crime, and getting tough on child prostitution and sex tourism. In some respects that is the easy part.

The greater challenge is to be just. I believe we have taken some steps in that direction with the victims rights bill and the youth justice bill. It remains to be seen whether parliament will be serious about aboriginal crime, organized crime and youth justice.

I am hoping that over the course of the next number of years the House will have the opportunity to be serious about being just.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have always found the member opposite to be reasonable and balanced in his approach. I congratulate him on his re-election.

There is quite a debate on justice issues. One that I thought gave the member opposite an opportunity to show his colours was the issue of child pornography. As the member will remember, that law was struck down in B.C. Many of my colleagues opposite asked the Prime Minister and the government to take all necessary steps to have that law reinstated, even if it meant something as drastic as the notwithstanding clause. If my memory serves me well, the hon. member opposite signed a petition to the Prime Minister asking for that step to be taken.

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• (1125)

When that very motion was put before the House, I do not recall the member voting for it. The wording was similar. Maybe he could explain to me why the rights of children did not take precedence over the rights of the pedophile and the rights of the true criminal.

We have not had a chance to go over it privately, so I will give him the opportunity in the House to explain why he would not vote for the motion when it came before the House.

Mr. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct. I did not sign the petition. The reason was that it was the cart before the horse: first the sentence and then the conviction.

The justice in the B.C. court said that subsection (4) of the child pornography laws was unconstitutional. That was upheld in the 2:1 decision in the court of appeal. I think that was the time at which the petition was circulated. The Government of Canada had intervened and it was to be a constitutional issue before the supreme court.

The invocation of the notwithstanding clause would have been premature until the supreme court ruled. The supreme court ultimately ruled in a 9:0 decision, which is an enormous decision on the part of the supreme court that this was a constitutional law. Therefore we as parliamentarians and the government would have looked like classic fools to have said that we would invoke the notwithstanding clause at any stage prior to the ruling of the supreme court.

The supreme court has deferred to parliament. It has recognized that when parliament speaks on a significant issue such as child pornography it will defer as long as there is some causal link between the harm that parliament is trying to remedy and the infringement on the freedoms contained in the charter.

I found the decision of the supreme court to be measured, realistic and something of which all Canadians could be proud. It restored something of the dialogue between the court and parliament. Until now I could make the argument that it was something of a monologue, that the court spoke and parliament listened. In this instance parliament spoke, the court listened and Canadian society is much better off.

My reasoning for not signing the petition was that it was entirely premature.

Mr. Grant Hill: Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask a supplementary question. The two years that have transpired between the law being struck down in the court in B.C. allowed pedophiles to escape justice. Many of them carried on with these activities. Their cases were not brought before the court. That gave them an opportunity to practise a craft that I will never understand.

Would the hon. member comment on the two years the law was not being enforced in Canada, thereby allowing pedophiles to conduct their craft?

Mr. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the striking down of that law was applicable only to British Columbia. The rest of the provinces were still proceeding with charges. In Ontario 41 cases were held up pending the disposition of the Supreme Court of Canada. I have received assurances from justice officials that all those cases will proceed in the normal fashion.

The comfort that we take and the surety we gain by a 9:0 decision was worth the minor delay.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor. I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

I would like to begin by expressing my thanks to the people of Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier for entrusting me for the second time in a row to represent them in the House, despite a tough campaign in which issues having nothing to do with federal politics were constantly being brought up.

Despite the smokescreens, they were able to see that what was principally at stake in this election was a repudiation of the Liberal government. This they have done, having resisted the demagoguery of certain individuals aimed at transforming this federal election into a referendum on an issue with no impact whatsoever on the federal scene.

The speech we heard a few days ago is very clear. Its underlying premise is very clear: denial of the reality that is Quebec in every statement it contains. Behind every word, every sentence, every paragraph, every chapter, lies the desire of the Liberal federal government to deny the existence of the Quebec nation and, worse yet, to deny the existence of certain consensus in Quebec, be they federalist or sovereignist.

I would even venture to say that there has never been any consensus in Quebec this government has not wanted to go against. Every time a consensus is reached in Quebec above party lines, be they federalist or sovereignist, Péquiste, Liberal, Action démocratique, socialist or whatever, this government tries to oppose it.

This is very apparent in the latest speech from the throne. I will give you only three examples, because, unfortunately, my time is limited. However, if the House were to give me more time, I would be pleased to give more examples.

The Address

First, let us look at parental leave. There is broad consensus in Quebec in support of an effective parental leave plan. In its Speech from the Throne, the Liberal government announced with great pomp that it wanted to make children a priority. Unfortunately, it is refusing to transfer the necessary funds to the Government of Quebec, which wants to establish a more complete, solid and effective policy on parental leave.

Among other things, the Liberal government is ignoring self-employed workers entirely. Heaven knows, in this new economy, many people, especially young people, work for themselves. They work at home, in the new Internet economy, in communications and so on.

With the proposed government plan, these people, especially the young, will not be covered by the parental leave plan. It is generally the young who have children and who need parental leave. So this entire segment of the population is denied the possibility of taking parental leave. This is an example of a consensus in Quebec, which the federal government has decided to oppose.

The second example is young offenders. Once again, the Bloc has done exceptional work representing the Quebec consensus on the federal scene. The member for Berthier—Montcalm, who is here today, has done a particularly fine job in this area.

All the Quebec stakeholders—judges, crown attorneys, defence lawyers, social workers and the police—everyone involved in juvenile delinquency in Quebec are saying “Do not touch the existing Young Offenders Act, it works”.

• (1135)

Not only does it work, but when the Standing Committee on Justice travelled across Canada to hear witnesses on the government’s intention to change the existing act, all the stakeholders said that the act worked well in Quebec, and was indeed an example that ought to be emulated.

But what did the federal government do? It seems to have taken the stand that, regardless of how well the act is working—provided it is properly implemented, of course—it shall be shelved and replaced with a harsher, more repressive measure.

I discussed this issue with friends, including Europeans, and commented that only in Canada could such a situation occur, whereby an act that is working well if it is properly implemented could be shelved and replaced with an unproven legislative measure. This is totally surreal.

This is why I am telling the government that, instead of imposing this new, harsher vision and running the risk of throwing out legislation that works very well in Quebec, it should include a clause allowing Quebec, if it so wishes, to implement the existing legislation.

If the other provinces want a harsher, more repressive law, they will have that option. But let Quebec manage the program the way it wants because, I repeat, it is working.

This was the second consensus the federal government decided to ignore.

The third example is education. To my astonishment, the throne speech went on and on about the federal government’s desire to interfere in the area of education although, as everyone would agree, this is a provincial jurisdiction and the one most staunchly defended since the British North America Act, 1867.

Certain passages took my breath away, and I will cite one of them from page 6:

Youth at risk are among the most likely to drop out of school or to have difficulty in making the transition from school to work. The Government will work...to ensure support for youth who particularly need help staying in school or getting their first job.

What is this if not a clear sign that the federal government wants to interfere in a jurisdiction that does not concern it?

Here is another example:

—many Canadian adults lack the higher literacy skills needed in the new economy. The Government of Canada will invite the provinces...to launch a national initiative with the goal of significantly increasing the proportion of adults with these higher-level skills.

The goals are great, but this is none of its business. Why is it getting involved at all?

This is the third example of a consensus against which the federal government has decided to pit itself. Those are three examples.

And that is not all. The federal government has announced its desire to invade the fields of manpower, immigration, health, the municipalities and family policy. In short, a massive invasion into areas of provincial jurisdiction has been announced by the federal government.

Unfortunately I do not have much time left, but I did want to say a word about the aboriginal people. We support the government’s avowed intent to make some progress in this area, but I would caution it to take care and to avoid reinventing the wheel.

Some years ago, after thousands of hours of testimony and after thousands of pages had been written on the subject and millions of dollars spent, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Erasmus-Dussault Commission, came out with some suggestions and conclusions that were, on the whole, very well received by all stakeholders. I am therefore asking the government to use the Erasmus-Dussault report as its basis, instead of trying to reinvent the wheel.

In conclusion, the historical framework does not change. After the 1982 repatriation in which Quebec was betrayed, after the

sinister agreement on the social union, which sanctions the federal government's invasion into areas of provincial jurisdiction, after the federal government's avowed desire in the throne speech to invade areas of provincial jurisdiction and, in a way, to trample over its own Constitution, Quebecers are faced with this choice: an increasingly unitarian state to be called Canada, or a new country they will construct for themselves, to be called Quebec.

I am willing to bet that this choice will be made sooner than expected and that Quebecers will choose to give themselves a country.

• (1140)

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my colleague on his accurate interpretation of the throne speech.

He looked at the speech from a Quebec perspective, naturally, and I think all Quebecers are analyzing much the same way the government opposite's views of provincial jurisdictions and the powers Canada has or is giving itself, since, as we know, Canada now has very considerable financial manoeuvring room.

It has accumulated billions of dollars on the backs of the provinces. With the throne speech, we can see just how the government is going to use this money to overlap provincial jurisdictions and oppose often vital consensus, such as on the Young Offenders Act, parental leave and other matters we will be seeing during the course of the government's term in office.

My question, however, is much more specific, in order to enable the member to answer it and also further enlighten our audience, especially the members here, the government members opposite, so they may make the appropriate representations to the Prime Minister and the leaders of this government.

I recall very clearly, when we arrived here in 1993, the government opposite, in an effort to stymie the sovereignist movement a bit, passed the famous motion—you will no doubt recall it—in which it said it recognized the distinct nature of Quebec society.

My question is very simple and it is for the member who examined the throne speech from Quebec's perspective, from the perspective of everyone in Quebec. Did the government opposite mention or hint at a follow-up to its motion on Quebec's distinct society in this speech? Where in the throne speech do we see that this motion has any value?

Mr. Richard Marceau: Mr. Speaker, members opposite are wondering why the percentage of voters has gone down significantly. To answer the hon. member's question I would say that perhaps it is because of a certain government and certain politicians who are not following up on their commitments and fulfilling their own promises.

The Address

Take, for example, the vote on the notion of distinct society. At the time, that motion was a pledge, a contract of sorts passed with Quebecers by the Liberals, whereby, in any bill or motion, the government would take into account the fact that Quebec is a distinct society. That was the promise made by the Liberals.

Unfortunately—and this did not surprise me—that promise was broken once again. Nowhere in the throne speech is there any mention of Quebec's specificity. Worse still, the government has decided to go against the consensus that exists in Quebec. And then it wonders why people do not bother to vote. People do not bother to vote because of such actions. The federal government promised to treat Quebec as a distinct society but then reneged on its word, on the motion that it passed in the House.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the voter turnout is dropping when promise after promise after promise has been broken by this government.

• (1145)

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House as the new member for the riding of Terrebonne—Blainville.

I owe this first term of office to my constituents and I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to thank them most sincerely for their vote of confidence. Ever consistent, they elected a sovereignist member, for whom Quebec is not a francophone minority in the rest of the country. Quebec is my country, my homeland.

My constituents are well aware that I am here to defend their interests and I assure them that I and my colleagues in the Bloc Quebecois will be following the federal government closely, knowing as we do how it delights in bringing in legislation that almost always ignores the jurisdiction of Quebec and leads to waste through constant duplication.

The Bloc Quebecois, for whom I am the status of women critic, will be on the lookout and will firmly condemn any failure to respect the interests and values of the Quebec people.

Tuesday, in the Speech from the Throne, Her Excellency the Governor General, the Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, mentioned that the government's goal, and I quote, is to "secure a higher quality of life for all Canadians".

As a woman and as the Bloc Quebecois's status of women critic, I wish to draw the attention of the House to the concerns expressed by the thousands of women who took part in the World March of Women, absolutely none of which are addressed in the throne speech. These women came to speak to us about poverty. They even suggested solutions, none of which have been acted on.

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In my opinion, and it is one shared by national, provincial and community organizations, the government has not taken any real initiative to combat poverty. In my opinion, much more needs to be done.

Ten years or so ago, when one in seven children was living in poverty, a resolution was passed unanimously in the House to "seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000." Yet in the year 2001, one child in five is still living in poverty in Canada, or approximately 400,000 more than in 1989.

The researchers and specialists who have studied this agree that poverty is the outcome of a number of unresolved problems relating to living conditions, and that poverty remains an essentially female phenomenon. Did the Minister of Finance, himself not tells us last September 27 that:

Today we have come to realize that poverty is not merely a matter of lack of income or even of knowledge. It is much more fundamentally the outcome of exclusion, insecurity and social and human inequality.

Yet, unfortunately, in his minibudget of last November he neglected to deal with this.

This prompts me to draw to the attention of the hon. members certain programs which, in my opinion, ought to take the following facts into account. More than 70% of part time jobs are held by women, and this blocks them from full access to employment insurance. What is more, the legitimate desire of women to combine child-rearing with the equally legitimate desire to create their own jobs through self-employment also denies them access to employment insurance, at least as it now stands. Let us keep in mind that those who do not contribute to employment insurance are not entitled to it. This means they are also not entitled to other compensations available to full time workers.

• (1150)

Therefore, women must have access to full time jobs, quality jobs, that are better paid and based on equity. In Canada, women are entitled to economic equality.

In addition, elements of other programs must also be significantly improved, including parental leave. Notwithstanding the extension of this leave, the program provides only 55% of the employee's salary over a maximum of 50 weeks. And so it has the opposite of the effect intended, that is, the parent receives only about half of his or her usual annual salary and this is a form of impoverishment.

In the context of its family policy, the Government of Quebec is calling for the transfer of the amounts Quebecers pay so it can set up its own parental leave program, which would be both a lot more generous and universal. Workers without any exception would be entitled to it, even those who are self employed, and without any waiting period.

Third, proper social housing has been completely ignored. Do we need to point out that the Liberal government has not invested a single cent since 1994 in new social housing starts. In a pinch, some of the money in the employment insurance fund surplus could have been transferred to the provinces so they could attend to regional needs for renovations to existing housing.

Poverty is also about single women and senior women, around 42% of whom live in poverty. The Bloc Québécois has long been calling for an increase in old age security payments for these women. It is about immigrant women, native women and disabled women who are isolated and excluded. In short, all these women, through their contribution to their community, have contributed or are still contributing to the economic, political and social life of Canada.

Poverty is also about all the men and women who care for others, either at home or in community organizations and who have been hard hit by the cuts to social programs. It is about all these people who feel forgotten and abandoned by the Liberal government.

I could give many other arguments for improving the living conditions of Quebecers and Canadians, all of which require that we first improve the living conditions of women. I would merely be echoing the demands of the thousands of women who took part in the World March of Women.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that, although women have made common cause around legitimate and shared concerns, they realize that those concerns do not impact on all of them equally. In their respective provinces and regions, they warned that justice, mutual assistance and social solidarity must take precedence over any partisanship.

The women of Quebec, like the women in Canada's other provinces and territories, are entitled to expect a genuine plan of action to address the ever-increasing poverty afflicting families, women and their children.

I want these families, these women and their children, to know that I will proudly carry the flame representing their hopes and that I will defend, with every fibre of my being, the fundamental right of the full citizens of Quebec and of Canada.

• (1155)

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to congratulate the hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville on her election. The Bloc Québécois is very pleased to have such an energetic woman in its ranks. My colleague will undoubtedly know how to protect Quebec's interests, as the Bloc Québécois has been doing since 1993. Her constituents have made an excellent choice.

I want to raise a more specific issue that relates to the throne speech. We just had an election campaign and the hon. member probably heard the same things I did. Women are currently the victims of several injustices in the federal system and this is what I want to discuss.

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The hon. member talked about parental leave. In Quebec, such benefits are much more generous and universal. We should get the money from the federal government and have a single program that would be even more beneficial. But there is the whole issue of employment insurance, an area where women are often penalized. Currently, even pregnant women are adversely affected. If a woman is covered by the CSST's preventative withdrawal from work, her weeks are not calculated to determine her benefits. The system is not geared to deal with the situation of these women.

There is also the fact that the family allowance program is obsolete. Shared custody is increasingly common and women must often fight to get the cheques. The system has not been adjusted.

Then there is the POWA program for those who lose their job when they are close to retirement. The federal government gives these people access to POWA, but when they reach age 65 and are entitled to old age benefits, the moneys paid during the previous year are taken into account. This means that these people are penalized for at least two years because of the income supplement. It is often women who are affected.

I am sure that the hon. member has heard about these problems. So has the Prime Minister. Upon reading the Speech from the Throne and from what she has heard, did the hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville come to the conclusion that the government has understood the demands that have been made, including through the World March of Women? Has the government understood the demands made by women during the election campaign and in recent years? Has the government opposite understood the needs of these women?

Is there hope, with the throne speech, that women's urgent needs will be met once and for all? Poverty affects everyone, particularly women.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Speaker, as I have said, the throne speech really has nothing to say in this regard.

I acknowledge that certain actions were taken after the March of Women. In Quebec, however, women are not satisfied. They have this in common with the women in the rest of Canada. There was a Canadian chapter at the World March of Women, with demands by the women of Canada and by the women of Quebec.

Each of these two groups reached agreement on certain general demands that were not heeded. Even when emissaries from the March met with Mr. Chrétien, they reported that they were offended. They were shunted aside after barely more than an hour with him. They knew they had not been listened to. The throne speech speaks clearly with its silence on this issue: there is no mention of what women want.

The women of Quebec are greatly offended by this, in part because they are very much aware that we in Quebec need all of our money to be able to function. They are very much aware of the fact

that Ottawa is holding back sums of money, supposedly for redistribution, but that redistribution is not happening. The money is not going to Quebec and so they do not have access to it. Yet they are entitled to it and I hope that they will finally be listened to.

• (1200)

The Deputy Speaker: If I may make a comment, I hesitated to interrupt the hon. member, particularly in her maiden speech.

I would remind her that in the House ministers must always be referred to by their duties and responsibilities, and not simply by their surnames.

I congratulate the hon. member on her maiden speech.

[*English*]

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Oak Ridges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot. This is an opportunity for me to address issues of concern to the residents of Oak Ridges, to my colleagues in the House and indeed to all Canadians. First and foremost, I welcome back my colleagues from the previous parliament and welcome the new members.

Elections by their very nature can be extremely partisan experiences, but when we enter the Chamber we come here for a common purpose: to work on behalf of all Canadians for the public good. I hope that in this session of parliament we will become better listeners and that we will try to strive together to deal with issues that are of concern to Canadians at large. It takes time to learn the procedures, practices and protocols of the House. Indeed every day is a learning experience. I wish all new members a very speedy learning curve.

The responsibility placed on all of us, by our constituents in our individual ridings and as a whole across Canada, is very awesome. Over the course of this parliament we will shape the very future of the country. I certainly would not be here today if it were not for the confidence again placed in me by the residents of the riding of Oak Ridges. I thank each and every one of them for their support and reassure them that I will dedicate my efforts to working on their behalf every day in the House.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker. There is no question about your vast experience and I look forward to fair rulings and orderly procedures. I must say that you have already started off very well today. I congratulate you.

I will focus on two key areas that I believe are important not only to me personally but to the residents of my riding. Today I will be dealing with the issues of urban centres and the conservation of Canada's natural spaces. My comments will focus on the issue of

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partnerships, which again I believe the Speech from the Throne addresses very well.

The roles that cities and towns and our local governments play in contributing to the quality of life of Canadians has been recognized in the Speech from the Throne. They are vital roles, impacting on everyday life, from water and waste water services, garbage collection and parks and recreation services to local roads, bridges and public transit.

Our cities are tasked with providing services that are essential to everyday life and they do so under great jurisdictional regulations. Every day our cities search for practical ways and means to meet the increasing demands on their financial resources.

For example, in Ontario the scope of provincial control over municipal governments remains largely unfettered. Municipal responsibilities can be altered by votes of the provincial legislature, although it was heartening to read that the premier of Ontario just indicated that he would like to see a more activist role by the Government of Canada in assisting with a number of key issues facing people who live in the cities, towns and villages of the province of Ontario.

In my own riding the municipal governments are faced with particular challenges, including homelessness, affordable housing, public transit, air pollution, and potential development of large tracts of land of the Oak Ridges Moraine.

The greater Toronto area federal caucus of the Liberal Party has been very active in articulating these issues over the past few years. I am very pleased that the Speech from the Throne addresses issues such as housing and the need to work with all orders of government in improving public transit and in dealing with environmental concerns, both in the greater Toronto area and across the country.

• (1205)

The Speech from the Throne also deals with the issue of improving municipal water and waste water systems through the federal-provincial-municipal infrastructure Canada program. I am very proud to say that in 1994 the government launched the first Canada works infrastructure program and renewed it in 1997. The fact that we are going forward again indicates that there is a very constructive and very positive role for the federal government to play, not only with the provinces and territories but with cities across the country. That is extremely important.

It is also important to note that the federal government in launching the national infrastructure program has recognized issues such as the need to improve public transit, water systems and waste management systems across Canada. It is providing dollars for that in conjunction with not only our provincial, territorial and municipal partners but also by encouraging and involving the private sector.

Close to home, one of the issues dealing with the environment which is very important to residents in my community is the issue

of development on the Oak Ridges Moraine. Nothing would please me more than to see development on that moraine curtailed to conserve this unique part of the Canadian landscape, the rain barrel of southern Ontario. In the past I certainly have favoured, and I continue to favour, a commission similar to the Niagara Escarpment Commission to ensure that the moraine is well looked after.

The moraine is a 160 kilometre ridge of sand and gravel that runs from the Niagara escarpment to Cobourg. It contains the headwaters of at least three major rivers: the Humber, the Don and the Rouge.

Conserving the natural spaces of the moraine and developing a greenbelt around the greater Toronto area would enhance the quality of life for people who live in an area with a population of about 4.5 million. With increasing urban pressures and mounting pollution problems, it could play a number of roles. It could be a place to go hiking or to ride a bike or a horse. It could be a protected area in which to preserve species at risk.

The Speech from the Throne addresses the point that we will be reintroducing the very important species at risk legislation. On the moraine there are 17 identified species at risk. Whether they be plants or animals, this is very important legislation which I hope will be embraced by all members of the House to protect those habitats and to safeguard the quality of water for the people of southern Ontario and the many others who draw their drinking water from the wells.

Many groups and individuals made a large and sincere effort to preserve this important physical feature. I commend the nine conservation authorities which have united as the Conservation Authorities Moraine Coalition to advocate for and protect the Oak Ridges Moraine along its entire length. Together the authorities own about 5% of the moraine and will work to preserve the integrity of the moraine.

There is a role for the federal government to play and I will continue to urge it to do so. Although the best approach is to permit local solutions to local problems and challenges, each order of government can and should be playing a very constructive role in this effort.

Issues also addressed in the Speech from the Throne that are of concern to my constituents include, interestingly enough, the issue of the agricultural sector. Although I have a very urban riding I do have some farmland and very active farms. The comment that we will move beyond crisis management in the farming sector is an important one because we are at a disadvantage when dealing with our American counterparts and the Europeans, particularly in the oilseed and grain areas. Others have applied subsidies that obviously have affected the farming sector very negatively.

The greater Toronto area federal caucus was involved in promoting the family farm last March. I was very pleased that my

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colleagues were involved in that promotion, recognizing that although we come from a predominantly urban area we cannot survive without the support of strong farms.

• (1210)

Issues that have been raised by my constituents include health care, taxes and debt reduction. The government's announcement last September of \$21 billion for health care was very welcome in our rapidly growing area.

We are here to improve Canada for the betterment of all Canadians. It is certainly my hope that we will be able to secure a strong, united Canada with opportunities and security for all in the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague, who is from a riding in Ontario and with whom I have worked on a number of occasions.

However, as a Quebecer and a member of the Bloc Québécois, I noted, as did other colleagues, that in the Speech from the Throne there is no reference or consideration given to the motion on a distinct society, something he in fact voted for, I believe.

How does he interpret this neglect of a great promise, since it followed the 1997 election and was considered very important at the time? I would like to know what he himself thinks about a distinct society, because he concluded his remarks with the words "a strong, united Canada". It is all very well to have a united Canada, but when the party in government forgets its own resolution on a distinct society for Quebec, which it introduced into the House, I would like an explanation.

I know he will agree to that, and will answer my question directly drawing on his personal opinions.

[*English*]

Mr. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I have enjoyed the opportunity of working with the member on a number of occasions and have always found him to be a very forthright and honest individual, particularly when it comes to his convictions.

As far as the issue of distinct society is concerned, the government certainly has indicated that wherever they are in Canada residents are part of a greater good. The government has worked extremely well in embracing that.

The country was created in spite of geography and in spite of history. We have managed to create one of the best societies in history. The fact that we have been recognized continually by the

United Nations as the best place to live, along with the fact that people continually want to immigrate here, would indicate that this is a country of opportunity.

I support the view of distinct society. Quebec is a distinct society, although one might argue that British Columbia or Newfoundland are distinct societies. Within the cultural and linguistic roles that we see in Quebec, I would definitely concur.

The government has taken very constructive steps over the years. There is the fact that we have official bilingualism in Canada. Anyone in the country can obtain services in either French or English from the federal government. I think that is an important recognition.

There is the fact that Quebec participates in international conferences with federal representatives. There is the fact that there have been more federal-provincial conferences. As a student of history, Mr. Speaker, you may know that the first federal-provincial conference was developed by Sir Wilfrid Laurier. He listened to our provincial counterparts.

I intend to rededicate myself this term to working with my colleagues, particularly those from Quebec. As a former president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities I have had the great pleasure of working with many mayors and councillors in Quebec. I have learned a lot about their concerns and their issues, which are often not much different from ours.

The fact is that people want a strong economy. People want to be recognized for their individual worth and they want respect, and we are working to ensure all of those things.

• (1215)

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague commented on the situation of the United States subsidizing its farming industry and as a result making it tough on farmers in Canada. From my perspective, it leaves the government open to blaming the guys down south.

Will the member acknowledge that the Government of Canada can address that issue? Under the trade agreement the government is allowed to improve the conditions and support farmers in Canada but it is failing to do so. Is the government willing to allow family farms in Canada to just go by the wayside because it does not want to support them? Is it willing to allow the U.S. to do it but not willing to support farms in Canada?

Mr. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne talks about moving beyond crisis management. We talked about partnerships. Quebec is an excellent example of having a very important farm support income program. The federal minister has written his counterpart in the province of Ontario but has yet to

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receive a response in terms of specific proposals because in the 60:40 cost sharing that we talked about, it is important that the province has a role to play and that it comes to the plate.

The government has certainly taken appropriate steps but there is more that needs to be done. It is not a question of blaming the Americans or the Europeans. It is a fact of life that it is an unequal playing field and we should not have a situation where that occurs. We will have to address it and may have to be more aggressive in the future. I have and will continue to raise those issues with the hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what an opportunity was lost yesterday. I came into the House and sat through the entire speech by the Leader of the Opposition. I did so because I was anxious to hear whether there were really any new ideas that the opposition might be considering approaching in this new parliament.

When I say new ideas, I am talking about the kind of things that we hear from our constituents that we know are major problems, that the government perhaps has been slow or reluctant to act upon and that we as backbench MPs might like to press the government to act upon, and certainly that we might like the opposition to put the government's feet to the fire on important issues affecting the nation. I was disappointed.

I heard 54 uses of the word empowerment as a noun, an adjective or a participle. It takes about a minute to say empowerment 54 times, but other than that there was very little of substance that I, as someone who likes to think of myself as someone who is always trying to find new approaches to the issues of the day, could not find very much. In fact, it was the opposite.

The Leader of the Opposition stated in his speech that charities needed more financial support from the federal government and not federal invasiveness.

The Leader of the Opposition is going entirely in the wrong direction in that statement. He obviously little realizes that the charitable sector, the not for profit sector, is one of the most important economic sectors in the land. It is a sector, Mr. Speaker, I should tell you, that runs almost completely without regulation, without legislation, without transparency and without accountability.

I will give some figures. There are 178,000 non-profit organizations in the country of which 78,000 are charities. Of those 78,000 charities, they receive more than \$90 billion in revenue a year. They employ 1.3 million Canadians. That is 9% of the entire workforce in the country. Yet there is not a regime that demands of those organizations the same kinds of standards of corporate governance or standards of transparency and accountability that we expect of the private sector.

• (1220)

The Leader of the Opposition really should reconsider what he said because what is wrong with the charitable sector is that for too long it has operated without government involvement. The consequence, as every Canadian knows, is that we have everything in the charitable sector, from scam charities using telemarketers to charities involved in financing ethnic conflicts abroad, but most of all, we have very expensive charities using the taxpayer dollars but not using them effectively.

For example, half of the \$90 billion is used by charities that are either hospitals or teaching institutions. That is \$45 billion. Yet we do not see the kind of transparency that we need to know that the money has been spent on our health care system in effective and efficient ways.

One might ask how I would know that. I can give an excellent example of the Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation in my riding, which is a very large teaching hospital. In 1996 it fired its chief executive officer and gave her a golden handshake of \$818,000. This year the Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation has fired another chief executive officer and the institution has given that chief executive officer a \$500,000 golden handshake.

What the institution has now done is it has hired a new chief executive officer from the Vancouver Hospital & Health Services Centre. That person was fired in October with a \$540,000 golden handshake and was hired by the Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation for \$346,000. That is \$1.8 million in golden handshakes alone between these two institutions. How many beds will that buy? How many nurses can be paid out of \$1.8 million? How many research scientists would like to have that kind of money? If those are only two hospitals, what is occurring across the country?

Mr. Speaker, I think you would find that politicians in this room can cite examples of where there is a lack of transparency and lack of proper management standards in the hospital and medical institutions within their own ridings.

It is very typical that the boards of directors have no guarantee that their chief executive officers will even report properly to them. The reason is that charities and non-profit organizations are not governed by the Canada Corporations Act. The only thing the Canada Corporations Act states is that charities and non-profit organizations will subscribe to guidelines of transparency and corporate governance but not to actual requirements, as are required of for profit corporations.

This goes on. If we extend the envelope and look at all the other charities and non-profit organizations out there, the 100,000 non-profit organizations, there is no public accountability whatsoever. We cannot obtain their financial statements or be guaranteed that their financial statements have the signature of government to say

that they are indeed honest and complete. These organizations do not have shareholders, so they can report what they want.

The unfortunate thing about this is that I have been on this problem since 1996. I prepared a report in which I examined the financial information returns of some 500 charities. I found all kinds of problems. In my report I recommended the government bring down legislation to actually define what a charity is, to set standards of corporate governance and so on.

I paid the price for that report. In the 1997 election I was the most attacked backbench MP by third party advertising. The charitable institutions took out full page ads during the election against me. The headlines read “Do you have no sense of decency, Mr. Bryden?” They had radio jingles depicting me as someone who obviously wanted to destroy the charitable sector: I wanted to destroy the charitable sector because I wanted to see transparency and accountability. Does that figure? That is why I say what an opportunity was lost.

● (1225)

When a backbench MP gets an initiative, he would like to think that he can get the support from his opposition colleagues; but, no, what I hear from the Leader of the Opposition is that he takes the side of these charitable institutions that are pressuring government to reform in some ways but not have mandatory reporting requirements.

The Leader of the Opposition alluded to the Prime Minister’s task force on the voluntary sector. That report was released just last year. It is true that as a result of the reports that I did there was a response both in the voluntary sector and here in government. That response was to do a study of the problem.

I do not doubt that some legislative changes or some changes will be coming in this mandate. I am terrified that the enormous lobby that is represented by the not for profit sector will persuade the government to set voluntary standards for transparency and voluntary standards for corporate governance.

I am hoping against hope that I can put pressure as a backbench MP on the government to really force this important sector of the economy, the \$90 billion sector of the economy, to be properly accountable.

I would hope that I would have the support of the opposition when we move forward in that direction. However, I do realize that often the initiatives of the backbench are really the initiatives of the backbench on one side of the House. They can be guaranteed of no support from the other side. I will press forward and I am sure that one way or another we will get the reforms that we need.

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for

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Nanaimo—Cowichan. I congratulate you on occupying the chair. I saw you operate there several years ago and you did a good job then. I welcome you back to the House. It is a pleasure to be back with you.

I will divide my speech into three parts: first, the *Maclean’s* annual poll about what Canadians value; second, leadership for Canada; and third, the foundation upon which leadership of the country should be based.

Maclean’s poll is conducted annually by Allan Gregg. This has been done for 25 years. This year’s poll indicates a shift. It used to be that economic issues like a balanced budget, paying down the debt and lower taxes were the primary issues bothering Canadians.

However that has now shifted. Social issues have become primary: health care, reorienting our educational system, grappling with homelessness and caring for our elderly in terms of health, home care, pensions, and the ability to provide food, shelter and clothing.

Canadians say that the role of government is central to our ability to develop a fair society which will deal with these issues. However there is no consensus on what are the solutions or what the specific role of government ought to be in dealing with these issues.

● (1230)

That draws us to the inevitable conclusion that to develop consensus in these areas requires that government take a leadership role. That leadership falls squarely on the shoulders of the Prime Minister and upon each member of the House, simply because people believe government should have a central role in this issue.

What is the context in which these things have been brought forward? Allan Gregg, who has conducted these polls over the past 25 years, concluded that there was a pattern of change in values over time. He said:

Our minds are better, but our institutions and our hearts perhaps aren’t. We don’t have the same kind of ethical and moral standards or health care system—these sorts of things are on the decline.

That is pretty significant. That same poll, conducted for the year 2000-01, found that 50% of Canadians want Canada to be governed according to Christian principles. I was drawn to that finding by the last sentence in the Speech from the Throne which reads:

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.

Divine Providence, according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, is God. That sentence reminded me of the findings of the poll conducted by Mr. Gregg for *Maclean’s* magazine.

What do Christian principles actually mean? I suggest among other things that it means there is a natural law, a single objective

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universal order. All laws, physical and moral, are subject to it. Physical and moral laws are seen as different because moral laws are obeyed by choice while physical laws operate independent of choice.

For example, stones fall and planets move in their orbits without choice, but men and women engage in moral behaviour by choice. While a stone cannot defy the law of gravity, man has a choice and may rebel against moral and ethical laws. That choice, however, does not do away with the reality of a single objective universal order covering both physical and moral laws.

To defy the law of gravity is to invite the consequences of such defiance. To defy the moral law of treating others as we would have them treat us is to invite the consequences of that defiance.

The inevitable consequence for people who defy the law of treating our neighbours as we would ourselves by engaging in such activities as racism, tyranny, bullying and fighting, is to destroy harmonious relationships between people as surely as walking off the roof results in physical injury to the body.

Despite the inevitable consequences of breaking moral laws, some people believe they are based on values that are subjective and relative only to the individual and therefore do not have to be obeyed in the same way as physical laws.

Why are moral laws so important? They are important because they form the basis of creating just laws, which in turn are the basis of a fair and just society. They require the pursuit of virtue.

Virtue is defined as moral excellence, uprightness and goodness. It consists of a clear understanding of right and wrong. It is personal. It comprises the full range of habits and dispositions that constitute good character among persons who are just, courageous, patient, kind, loyal, loving, persistent and devoted to duty. A virtuous society can be created only by virtuous people whose individual consciences guard their behaviour and hold them accountable.

We do not produce a virtuous society by allowing everyone to do what they want. People must adhere to a common set of values. If they do not, chaos will result, crime will increase, authority will be disrespected, and the people will become incapable of governing themselves.

At such a time conditions are ripe for tyranny. In a tyrannical regime, order is created by coercion and fear. There is no individual freedom in such a society. Neither is there any semblance of personal responsibility for acting appropriately.

• (1235)

I quote Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcy in their most recent book. They write as follows:

Virtue is essential for freedom. People who cannot restrain their own baser instincts, who cannot treat one another civilly, are not capable of self-government. Without virtue, a society can be ruled only by fear, a truth that tyrants understand all too well.

Michael Novak, who won the Templeton Prize for religion, agrees and observes that:

Our people are losing virtue and that is why we are losing self-government. And if we cannot govern ourselves, then we invite others to govern us.

This observation applies to Canada today. The United Nations conventions, for example, have more influence on supreme court decisions about moral and ethical issues than do the laws passed in the House of Commons because parliament has not indicated the intention of those laws.

We parliamentarians should do our duty. It is our duty to legislate responsibly, and in particular:

Questions of morality and social policy should not be the exclusive preserve of a constitutional court, but should be debated and acted upon by those who represent us in Parliament. . . Our political leaders deserve opprobrium for sloughing it off.

That was the *National Post* editorial of January 29, 2001. I would ask the Prime Minister if he agrees. If so, why would he not give some indication of this in his speech, particularly as there are several references to law and order?

I believe he does, or did the Governor General include the last sentence of the Speech from the Throne without his knowledge or permission? It states:

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.

These remarks were addressed to the House of Commons, members of parliament and the Senate.

It is my hope and my prayer that the Prime Minister and all members of the House will recognize that there is Divine Providence, God, whose law must be obeyed, and that to have peace and harmony in our society we must do so.

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I begin by congratulating you. I know you will do a tremendous job in the chair as you always have done in the past in other venues. I wish you the very best.

I listened with interest to the member opposite in terms of things moral and otherwise. Could he comment on the morality of people saying that they will never be part of a pension plan, that they will never be part of dipping into what they consider to be a gold plated pension? It strikes me that members on that side of the House even went so far as to make pig noises in this hallowed place.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: They wore pig buttons.

Mr. Lynn Myers: They wore pig buttons. That is correct. They went on to have pink pigs out on the front lawn of the House of

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Commons. Now we see this interesting twist of fate, with members from the reform alliance, those holier than thou people, getting up and saying they want to buy back in.

For example, the high priestess of principle, the member for Edmonton North, and others who said with great principled statements and morals up to the teeth that they would never be part of this, are now part of it. I wonder about the morality of that and I wonder if the member could comment on that.

I also wonder about the morality of people who make strong public statements about the wise use of tax dollars, the morality of spending tax money wisely, while the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition bellies up to the trough and asks Alberta taxpayers for \$800,000 when it could have been settled long before that amount of money was spent.

I want to hear from the member opposite about the morality of belying up to the trough for pension money, having stated categorically they never would. I want to hear why his leader asks Alberta taxpayers for \$800,000 to pay a lawsuit he could have settled for about \$60,000. Where is the morality in that? I want to hear the hon. member's response to that.

• (1240)

Mr. Werner Schmidt: Madam Speaker, I actually cherish the member's question. It is a very appropriate question and one I am honoured to answer.

The morality that we have to live by is first of all individual and secondly one of society. The moral law is subject to the natural law and does and should apply to all people.

With regard to the pensions, I make abundantly clear to all members of the House that while I was given the opportunity to buy back into that pension I did not do so. I have signed the declaration that says I will not.

The allegation that I have done so is simply false. It is an individual matter. I stand before you, Madam Speaker, before the hon. member who just asked the question, and before every member, to state that I did not do that. I have no intention of doing so. I did not do it because of the principle that I stated earlier. That is what I stand for. That is the issue.

With regard to the other question which has to do with the Leader of the Official Opposition being given money from the insurance fund of the Alberta government, that is essentially a provincial matter. Really the issue has to do with whether the intent of the fund was realized in this issue. That becomes the question. I rest my case.

Mr. Steve Mahoney (Mississauga West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my congratulations to you. I am delighted to see you in the chair. I know that you will be fair and patient with some of the goings on that may or may not occur in this place.

I wonder if the member would answer the question. He said that his morals would preclude him from buying back into a pension plan that he and many of his colleagues, including the hon. member from Edmonton North, have criticized vocally, used as an election platform, and told anyone who would listen how awful it was that the plan was accepted. Could the hon. member comment on that?

Mr. Werner Schmidt: Madam Speaker, I neglected to congratulate you before and I do wish to do so. You grace the chair. It is very nice to see you there and it is good to have you back in the House.

With regard to the question of the hon. member opposite, we do need to recognize that if we break ethical and moral laws the consequences are as clear and direct as when we break a physical law.

I have stated clearly that my position has been and remains that. I wish that everyone in the House would recognize that it is important to be honest and have integrity in everything we do. That is where I stand my case.

Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today in this new session of parliament. I thank the electors of Nanaimo—Cowichan for returning me to the House and congratulate you, Madam Speaker, upon your appointment to the chair. I know that we can look to you for fairness and justice in this, the people's place, the House of Commons.

The beginning of a new legislative session gives one the opportunity to look back and to look ahead. I am sure all members of the House are here because they have a deep concern for the country and the direction in which it is going. I think it is clear that those in leadership set the tone for the country. That includes moral and ethical directions.

Let us look back for a moment at the election campaign and ask ourselves if this was an indication of the moral and ethical direction of the country. I was personally saddened, as were many Canadians, by the vicious attack on people of faith by those who were opposing our party and our leader. I have always believed that Canada was a country that showed tolerance and understanding of people of all faiths.

• (1245)

However, to publicly scorn and ridicule the people of Christian faith brought the level of debate in the campaign to a new low in Canadian politics. The false accusations that members of the Canadian Alliance were racists and bigots showed a contempt and an intolerance for anyone who happened to disagree with their position. If this was leadership exhibiting honesty, truth and integrity, then we are in serious trouble.

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As we think of the campaign of the year 2000 and the way it was conducted, may we all adopt as our motto the words of those who cannot and will not forget the Holocaust of World War II, "Never Again".

It is with that concern about the past that I now look to the future. May all of us in the House strive to be truly honourable members, admitting our failures, asking forgiveness and working together for the common good of this great nation.

I am the newly appointed chief critic for Indian affairs and northern development for the Canadian Alliance caucus. Some would say that moving into this portfolio does little to advance one's own political career. Let me tell members that it is not for those reasons that I have offered myself to work on behalf of Canadians in this area. I have a vested interest in our native peoples because I have three aboriginal sons and daughters.

My wife and I have known and worked with many native mothers and families in our role as foster parents over the past 27 years. When I talk about third world conditions on reserves, high suicide rates, substance abuse, corruption and many other concerns, I have witnessed these firsthand.

We have talked for so long about these problems but talk is cheap unless it is backed up by concrete actions that allow us to work with our native brothers and sisters to help them achieve equality and opportunity in this land.

With that as a preamble, I would like to turn my attention to the throne speech. Therein we find the themes of innovation and inclusion. While these are good words, I would like to suggest that the Canadian people, both native and non-native, would rather hear us talk about equality and accountability.

Across Canada there are many stories of aboriginal successes. We have many good role models, as aboriginal athletes, actors, professionals, businessmen and women have excelled all across the country. For instance, there are success stories in the Canadian film making industry where four films on aboriginal themes were recently accepted and viewed at the famous Sundance film festival in the United States.

Despite these successes, I am convinced that grassroots aboriginal Canadians do not feel a sense of equality and opportunity in this land. Why would that be? May I suggest that some of it is because of a lack of transparency and accountability in native government systems.

In my own riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan I hear of government money being misused and unaccounted for. People live in mouldy homes and in almost third world conditions while leadership builds new homes and goes on trips abroad. Money that should have been used for health and education goes for other purposes that do not increase the standard of living for band members.

What happens when ordinary aboriginals question their leadership and organize opposition to them? They are ostracized, denied

funding, threatened and sometimes physically abused to the point of serious injury and worse. This simply has to stop.

Let us look at some specifics referred to in the throne speech. The government has stated that it will work with aboriginal people to help strengthen their entrepreneurial and business expertise. I agree that economic growth and security are necessary for aboriginal people to achieve self-sustainability. Aboriginal people must be given the full authority, responsibility and accountability for economic developments and partnerships.

It is very important that we come along side of aboriginal business in partnerships that will lead to economic stability among natives. Unfortunately the track record is not good. Just ask Wing Construction Limited of Thunder Bay, Ontario about its experience with the Sagkeeng Band and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. It will tell us how difficult it is to develop these partnerships in an atmosphere of mutual trust. The consequence for that company was the bankruptcy of a 50 year old business.

• (1250)

This sends a wrong message to the private sector and has led many non-native companies simply to refuse to do business with native bands.

The government has stated that it would continue to support the community access program and SchoolNet, ensuring that aboriginal Canadians, their communities and their schools could have an on ramp to the information highway. It is all well and good, and a noble aim, but many natives who live in homes without running water or toilet facilities would rather have that problem fixed first before they have Internet capabilities. Let us get our priorities straight.

Government spending in the area of Indian affairs is in excess of \$6 billion a year. With all that money at their disposal, why in the world do most of our aboriginal people still live in third world conditions, with a suicide rate four times the national average, an unemployment rate of up to 85%, the incidence of diseases such as diabetes, tuberculosis, AIDS/HIV and hepatitis C running way above the general population, substance abuse that affects 80% of natives either as users or as families of users, and a disproportionate number of native Canadians in prison.

The policies of the government and governments before it are simply not working. We in the Canadian Alliance want to work with aboriginal leaders and their people to find real sustainable solutions. I believe those solutions revolve around the words equality and accountability.

I certainly commend the government for strengthening aboriginal governance by implementing more effective and transparent

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administrative practices. The government has known for years that there are major problems with the lack of transparency in aboriginal governments on many reserves. Recently the Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Matthew Coon Come encouraged his chiefs to open the books and be accountable to their people. This is something that the Alliance fully supports and has encouraged for a long time.

We also support the minister's musings leading up to the throne speech about having Elections Canada supervise band votes. It has long been advocated by the Canadian Alliance. We are happy to see that the minister has adopted our policy in this regard. If he will commit seriously to the gradual elimination of the reserve system and the abolishment of the Indian Act, we will all rejoice and even give him a free membership in the Canadian Alliance.

Early childhood development programs and services are important, but we also need to be certain they are effectively dealing with the problems that aboriginal people are facing in their communities. For instance, did the head start program assist the children of Davis Inlet? How many other Davis Inlets are there across the country just waiting to explode?

I have experienced fetal alcohol syndrome with native children and know the extra care and burden that it brings. Again it is nothing new. We have known for years that it is a huge problem. The government and governments before it have known it also.

In 1992 the health committee under the Conservative government after serious study presented recommendations which if followed would have made an impact on the problem, but nothing has been done in seven years under either the Conservatives or the Liberals. We will be keeping the government accountable.

Native Canadians want to take full responsibility for their lives and throw off the paternalistic trappings of government intervention that have kept them second class citizens. We in the Canadian Alliance will work with the government, indeed with anyone, to achieve that end.

I was encouraged by the words of the minister of Indian affairs who said that it is time to start walking the walk. I pledge myself and my party to keeping his feet to the fire.

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first I congratulate the member opposite for taking on the post of aboriginal affairs critic. It is one of the most difficult portfolios on either side of the House. I am sure he will do a very fine and sincere job.

I have one question. In his speech the Leader of the Opposition mentioned that the Canadian Alliance felt there should be home and property ownership on reserves and that individuals should be able to buy and sell property.

• (1255)

Could the hon. member elaborate on that a little? Would that include only residents on reserves? Would it allow newcomers to reserves to buy property? Would it enable property owners to sell to people off reserve?

Mr. Reed Elley: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from the hon. member. I know a little about his riding having lived in Hamilton and attended McMaster University for seven years. He has a very nice riding.

The Canadian Alliance, and before it the Reform Party, has for a number of years included in its policies the belief that there should be an opportunity for private ownership on reserves.

It is a multi-faceted question in the sense that it has to do with what will happen in treaty negotiations and the kind of self-governance models that are finally put in place at the end of treaty negotiations.

In particular, British Columbia has 100 treaties to be negotiated, approximately 50 of which are now underway. We need to take a good look at that whole area, especially in terms of urban treaties. We are having problems in British Columbia in terms of the settlement of urban treaties. I will probably have the first urban settlement of a treaty in my riding.

One of the problems we see in terms of private property, whether it be something that comes out at the end of the day in the governance model, is that many municipalities do not feel they are being included in the treaty process.

The city of Nanaimo has been asking the minister to include that level of government at the table, for it to have the opportunity to vote at all levels. Quite frankly rage and frustration are building in the non-native population because they are not at the table. They will not be able to make decisions on it or any other issue because they are not present with voting privileges.

Many native people have talked to me personally. They want the right to own personal property. We also have to respect native culture and the communal aspect of native culture.

Across the country there are differences in native culture which must be respected. However as a basic principle we are in favour of private ownership of property. There is some appetite for that in the native community. We are quite willing to sit down with that community and to talk about that issue.

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member opposite on his new role as critic. While he was bemoaning a number of things during the election I was thinking of a number of things that happened,

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including the Betty Granger incident in Winnipeg, the Asian invasion, the fundraiser in Vancouver with the racist comments, Doug Christie and the rally with the white supremacists, and Jim Keegstra saying how proud he was to vote Canadian Alliance.

That aside, would the member in his position now—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan on a very short answer.

Mr. Reed Elley: Madam Speaker, I am very sorry that I did not get the last part of the hon. member's question. Perhaps he would like to talk to me privately.

Mr. Steve Mahoney (Mississauga West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, congratulations to you. You said you are learning in the job. Many people around here will be doing that over the next months and years to come. However I am sure you are a quick study, having worked with you in our caucus structure, and will pick it up very quickly.

• (1300)

I thank the voters of Mississauga West for once again showing confidence in my leader and my party and in my representative ability to be here in Ottawa and represent the three communities of Erin Mills, Meadowvale and Streetsville. I have had the privilege of representing much of the area of Mississauga West for about 21 out of the last 23 years, as a city councillor, an MPP in Ontario and, since 1997, as a member of this wonderful House.

My wife, of course, is also a municipal councillor in the same community, re-elected for her fourth term on city council with over 92% of the vote. My only hope is that she does not run against me one day.

Our family really has been tremendously active and involved in the community over the past number of years, and we really deem it an honour to represent those communities here in Ottawa, at the municipal level, or indeed at the provincial level.

I am interested, though, in what seems to be the debate du jour or the issue of the week or the focus of the opposition when it comes to this place. Opposition members talk about reform of parliament. They seem to want to hang their hats on the issue that somehow the role of backbench members of parliament has been denigrated, that we have had the thumb pressed down upon us and that our ability to represent our constituents has been somehow mysteriously negated by the PMO or by the system. I take great exception to that.

I would like to share with members and with anyone listening the success stories of some of those so-called backbenchers that I have experienced by being in this place since 1997.

My good friend from Mississauga South was referenced in the Prime Minister's speech yesterday for the books he has written and for the work he has done on fetal alcohol syndrome and the effects

on children. He and other members of the social policy caucus have had a tremendous impact on driving the government agenda toward investing in children and toward recognizing that children are our most important assets. The government intends to support children, to eliminate poverty for children and to provide educational opportunities for children and for adults, as was said in the throne speech.

That member would tell us that he did not do it alone. He may have led the issue from the point of view of the fetal alcohol syndrome aspect, but there were many other issues that were dealt with by the group. That was really true, constructive, positive work, done on behalf of the entire caucus, the government and their constituents, in order to drive an issue that they believed in.

There are others. I recall that in the last parliament the member for Trinity—Spadina led a task force dealing with the banking issue and the mergers. Many members of caucus were involved in countless meetings. The caucus committee travelled and met with pro bank advocates and anti bank merger advocates. The committee put together a very thoughtful report, which in my view drove the agenda of the government.

Is that ineffective? Is that a member of parliament or a group of backbenchers having their rights and their powers stripped from them? If some think it is, I beg to differ.

I think of the member for York North and her almost heroic dedication to the environment. I think of the conferences she has held, inviting experts from all over the world to meet in Room 200 in West Block. Many of my colleagues have attended and have seen the tremendous effort, hard work and dedication that this backbench member put into fighting on environmental issues, not only for her constituents, not only for the people of Canada, but for the planet.

• (1305)

On cultural issues, I think of my good friend from Parkdale—High Park. In my view, her sole effort has driven the caucus and the government, with support from backbench members, to re-invest in CBC, to say that we believe CBC is the electronic highway that goes from sea to sea to sea. There are communities that would be isolated without the good work of the CBC. That backbench member, along with many of her colleagues, was indeed successful in doing the job of a member of parliament.

The member from Scarborough East has spent countless hours in meetings on the housing issue. He managed to drive the agenda so that \$750 million was made available for the homeless. His efforts as the chair of that committee drove the government to do it. Further, there is an additional investment of \$850 million for affordable housing as we work with our partners in the municipal

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and private sectors to address the issue. Did that item just appear or somehow fall from the sky? Members know that is not the case.

Members know that every one of the issues to which I have referred have been driven hard by backbench members of the government. I categorically reject any of the nonsense that members of parliament and their relevance have been devalued in this place, in the broader precinct of Ottawa and in the country. The talent in this room, on all sides, is abundant. Someone said the other day that here there are 301 A-type personalities in one room, so we should be so surprised that from time to time there are a little heckling, a little fire and a little controversy. What a shock. Could we imagine this place without that?

In true fashion we all know that the distance between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition is the distance there is when a man is standing with a sword in each hand and the tips are barely touching. The symbolism is that we do not kill each other. We do not, although we might like to at times, run across the floor and start punching each other out like members do in some parliaments of the world. This is the greatest example of parliamentary democracy—

An hon. member: What about Darrel?

Mr. Steve Mahoney: There are exceptions. I forgot about him, but even he was reined in, grabbed and pulled back, and he realized how silly and nonsensical it was to get violent and physical over the democratic issues we fight about. We do not kill one another. Our weapons, I would like to think, and it is scary to think it, are our minds. Words are our ammunition and we hurl them at one another with some enthusiasm, both during speeches and in question period when the odd bit of heckling occurs.

I reject the attempts by the opposition to paint government backbenchers as ineffective and unimportant and to denigrate their role. To have the confidence of his or her constituents is indeed one of the most honoured positions that a man or woman can have, and in my case my constituency is one of the largest by population in the country. They say to each and every one of us that they want us to fight in Ottawa for a better Canada, for a better Mississauga West or a better Ontario.

On CPAC last night there was a debate among three representatives, our whip from the Liberals, the House leader from the Alliance, and a member from the Bloc. The member from the Bloc made the point that the House is always empty when we stand in our place to speak. It is not completely empty now, but where do people think our colleagues are? They are not sleeping. They are not shopping. They are working.

• (1310)

We have a system that is extremely complex, and frankly, having 300 people sitting in this room to listen to me go on would be a total waste of their time. I am sure hon. members would agree. It

might be entertaining and fun from time to time, but it would not be the most productive use of the brain cells that God gave them.

Where should they be? They are in committee. They are in meetings. They are talking to their constituents. They are meeting with staff and the bureaucracy. They are meeting with each other. They are working on the issues I spoke of, whether that be regarding children, the CBC, housing or the agricultural community.

If we want to talk about the effectiveness of a backbencher, let us talk about the member for Toronto—Danforth, who led the charge by hosting an event at the Air Canada Centre. I was there and it was packed. What was it about? It was not about the city of Toronto. It was not about transfer payments. It was not about tax cuts. It was about farmers. We had a well-known member from downtown Toronto leading the charge because our constituents in the urban communities we represent need farmers. They need successful farms.

That is what Canada is about. It is about people helping people, realizing that if we help one another we are going to create jobs, economic growth and benefits and build a better country.

This is another example of a backbencher who has a tremendous contribution to make to this place.

Mr. Dennis Mills: The member has my vote.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: I thank the member. I find it repugnant when I hear opposition members level these criticisms that they know are not based on honesty or truth. They know this full well because they all work in caucuses where their members are busy working at the job of being a member of parliament. In my experience in this place, the job can start as early as 6 a.m. and wind up as late as midnight, five or six days a week.

I do not look for sympathy from anyone for the hours that I put in. I have been doing this job in one form or another for 23 years. There was a two year period when I was out of office due to health and fatigue reasons—the voters were sick and tired of me—but I came back because I really and honestly believe that it is one of the most honourable professions and important callings that anyone in this country can aspire to. I hope I live long enough to see the day when one of my sons will stand in this place. I hope that happens, but if it does not, maybe one of their children will stand in this place.

At one time I would have had the opportunity to see my own father sitting in the Senate. Unfortunately he had a stroke and was unable to take the seat given to him by Pierre Trudeau. It would have been one of the proudest moments of my life, yet we also unfairly denigrate the role of Senators.

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Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Oh, come on.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Yes, we do, especially that member.

It seems that the best way to get a yuk out of the voters is to run down the job we hold. Anyone who does that does themselves a disservice and a dishonour and in fact does their constituents a disservice and a dishonour because they are not being truthful about what we can accomplish.

Let me just shift gears a little. In addition to the reform of parliament, one of the issues we deal with is respect of parliamentarians. This is addressed in the throne speech. It occurred to me this morning that we have a new game in the House of Commons. It is called "Who wants to be a millionaire?" In the game, an initial question is asked. In the television show it is called the fastest finger question; whoever can answer the question the fastest gets to be the candidate.

Here is the question: who wants to get back into the pension plan? Guess who won? The member for Edmonton North had the fastest finger and managed to turn an \$89,000 reinvestment into an asset that has been estimated to be worth more than \$1 million. She indeed has become the latest millionaire. It might be more. I have a problem with that. If I was one of her constituents my question would be "Is that your final answer?" I would want to know why she railed against that as being somehow unfair, as being overly rich.

• (1315)

Not only did the member for Edmonton North do it but her entire party platform was built once again on the denigration of MPs and their role and the fact that they tried to remember the pigs, as my hon. friend mentioned, the snorting and the buttons. It was absolutely disgraceful behaviour. We have grown to become accustomed to it. They wear sombreros and drape old jalopy cars in Canadian flags. They use anything it takes to get a little attention. How to get on the nightly news: bring a pig into the House of Commons and snort a little.

One of the members from that caucus failed to respond to a question he was asked by one of my colleagues when he gave a speech about morality. The member stood in his place all high and mighty. This reminds me of the sixties when we had the moral rearmament army driving around the country trying to sell its vision of Christianity.

I heard another member say that he was disgusted that Christianity was attacked. Well I am a Christian and I was not attacked. Why is that? It is simple: I do not put my religion in my platform. I do not say to people, as the Leader of the Opposition does, "here is what I believe in: I do not believe in a woman's right to choose. I believe in three strikes for young offenders then they are out and

the key is thrown away. I also believe in capital punishment. If you vote for me these are the things I believe in but I will not implement any of them". What a remarkable campaign that would be.

Canadians are used to people standing up and saying what they believe in and what they will do if they vote for them. This is a pretty normal, reasonable position for a politician to take. People want to know our beliefs so they can either believe us or not or so they can agree with us or not. To say that one believes in all of this and yet not implement it, Canadians obviously do not buy that.

I said we are judged by the lowest common denominator in this place. Here is another example of why Canadians get upset at politicians. When the Leader of the Opposition was a member of the Alberta legislature, he openly and publicly issued a slanderous letter criticizing a lawyer in the local community and he was sued. He then settled for over \$800,000. Guess what he did? He jumped on his horse and rode east to Ottawa claiming to be the new sheriff in town and left the taxpayers of Alberta stuck with a bill of \$800,000. That is the kind of denigration that causes people to lose faith in parliamentarians and in the system.

It is not an empty House of Commons. Canadians are smart enough to know that MPs are working hard and not just sitting here wasting their time. They are working hard on behalf of taxpayers. They know that jumping back into a pension plan, that leaving taxpayers with an \$800,000 bill, while at the same time claiming to be the great protector of the taxpayer dollar, is frankly not being honest with taxpayers. It is my view that gentleman and that lady will pay the price. When asked "is that your final answer" people will say our final answer is "you're cooked".

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure you will agree with me that the remarks just made by the member for Mississauga West are disappointing.

The job of MP is no doubt a very honourable one. I also know of a number of other very honourable jobs in Quebec and in Canada. There is one thing we will agree on for sure and that is that the speech just given was not honourable. It was petty. The member did not attack the opposition or the Bloc Quebecois in particular, but there are, I think, limits at some point.

I rise in the defence of all those he attacked, because he knows full well that what he said was just about totally false. It is inadmissible.

It is true that nowadays politicians do not command a great deal of respect. But I can understand that voters who listen to the debates in the House of Commons and who hear a speech like the

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one we have just heard no longer trust us. I can understand that they have lost their faith in us. I would have liked to hear the government member talk about the real issues.

I hope the hon. member read today's newspapers. Many journalists and editorial writers said that the throne speech lacked content, that there was no point to it. It is as though nothing has changed. There were some major oversights in the speech.

I would have liked to hear what the member had to say about employment insurance, about the people who are starving right now. How does the government plan to help them, rather than going after someone who is entitled to a pension?

Here, we work very hard for what we earn. I think that everyone, even people working in the public and private sectors, is entitled to a pension after devoting their working life to a job. I would have been more interested to hear what he had to say about employment insurance and health.

All the provinces, not just Quebec, are complaining that they do not have enough money, because the federal government is too tight-fisted. They are demanding their fair share of transfer payments.

What does the member have to say about that? Absolutely nothing. He is only interested in general attacks on the members opposite, as though the Liberals were the sole holders of the truth. How very arrogant in the first week of this new parliament.

Consideration must also be given to the various demands being made by the provinces. There is Quebec, which is unanimous in its opposition to the Young Offenders Act. The throne speech would have us think the opposite.

I would like the member to reflect a little on his honourable position, to give an honourable speech this session and use his remaining time to talk about actual issues addressed in the throne speech, instead of launching pointless attacks on opposition members.

[*English*]

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit I do not know if he was listening to the same speech.

I respect his right to disagree with my viewpoints. I respect his right not to like what I am saying. I do not frankly care very much but I respect it.

I would add that this is Thursday of the first week and we will be reintroducing the EI legislation. I hope the member will support the changes. We will be reintroducing the young offenders legislation. I hope the members of his caucus do not do what they did last time. They introduced over 3,000 amendments, most of them changing a comma to a semicolon, which was nonsensical, all because they were throwing a temper tantrum.

The effect of my speech and my opinion, very strongly held I might add, is that when members denigrate members of parliament they do a disservice to all people who elect us to come here. If that member does not agree, I am sure he would rather be elected to serve only in the national assembly in the province of Quebec. I would invite him to retire to his own community and do it in that venue if that is where he is more comfortable.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskeewin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I find rather interesting some comments made in the middle of the speech by the member for Mississauga West. I will attempt to find points of agreement where I can. He said at a juncture that it was a waste of everybody's time to hear him speak in the House. I find that I cannot disagree with that. Giving him the benefit of the doubt and concurring that may well be the case, for the benefit of the public and the viewing audience, could he expand and give examples as to why it is a waste of time to hear his speech in the House because many of us find ourselves in heartfelt agreement with his comments in that respect.

• (1325)

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Mr. Speaker, I knew that one would come back to haunt me as soon as I said it.

The hon. member knows that what I am referring to is that all of our colleagues in all caucuses are not sitting in the House listening to all of us speak. They are working in committees and in their offices, where hopefully they have their televisions on listening to us as we put forth our positions and either defend or attack. This is the process.

Having 301 people sitting in this place would not be the most constructive use of their time and would grind business in the House to a halt. The job here involves a tremendous amount of committee work on legislative committees, a tremendous amount of caucus work on caucus committees, returning phone calls of constituents and meeting with groups who have particular issues, such as the agricultural group that is going around meeting with MPs today. They have things that must be done. The hon. member knows that.

While he is correct in quoting me, he also knows that, in the context of my remarks, I said that it was vitally important that all members do their job as MPs and be respected for that. On CPAC last night, the Bloc member made a big point about the fact that there are not very many members in their seats when speeches are going on. There is a very good and justifiable reason for that and I believe if the taxpayers know the truth, they will support that reason.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, congratulations to you for your ascent to the

The Address

noble position of Deputy Speaker of the House. I know you have some experience that you can draw upon in your previous vocation as an NHL referee that will serve you very well in this Chamber.

I would like to congratulate as well the hon. member for Mississauga West for his remarks. It is good to see that he has not lost any steam in the time that he has been out of this place. He has contained much of the usual vitriol, vigour and adrenalin, and some healthy amount of horse feathers.

The hon. member is correct. I must attach myself to the remarks with respect to the work that is done by members in the Chamber. I congratulate him and encourage him to continue to point this out.

However, with respect to the content, I find that it is analogous to the throne speech itself because it was quite vacuous in terms of substantial comment or real substance about what his party and his government's vision is for the country. There are great platitudes found in both documents and the speech that we have just borne witness to.

The difficulty that Canadians are having is seeing any sort of concrete plan laid out before them. Even after an unnecessary election, which did result admittedly in the endorsement of the government, there is still no point on the horizon on which Canadians could focus as to where the government is going in the face of potentially difficult times, and there are already difficult times facing many Canadians. That is where the disappointment lies when one examines in detail the throne speech.

The member pointed to specific references to members of the House who have made a difference and that is admirable. That is in fact something that again we should all be proud of collectively in the Chamber. Regardless of what side of the House, individual members do make a difference in their constituencies and communities.

However, it appears undeniable that individual members, particularly those who take legislative initiatives, are bound into submission by the PMO and by personnel in the Prime Minister's Office who are very restrictive in their support of individual initiatives. We do not have to look any further than a colleague of the hon. member, the member for Mississauga East.

The Deputy Speaker: I see the clock running down on questions and comments and wanting to leave a little bit of time for the member for Mississauga West, I wonder if the member could please complete his remarks and then we will get on with the answer.

• (1330)

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member not agree that there is a great deal more that can be done to enhance private members' business and their ability to participate more

fully in the Chamber, more fully on legislative initiatives and more fully on committees? Does the hon. member really believe that his government, his House leader and his Prime Minister are sincere when they indicate an openness and willingness to do this?

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Mr. Speaker, I want to be the first to congratulate, well in advance, the member opposite on his eventual ascendancy to the position of leader of what is left of the Progressive Conservative Party. In all seriousness, I do appreciate the remarks and the question.

Yes, I do think there are things we can do to improve our opportunities at legislative committees. It was referenced in the throne speech, and I think there are things we can do to improve the House. However, if we approach it from the negative side and say that the role of backbench MPs has been denigrated and that we have been stripped of power and all those kinds of thing, I do not think that is at all helpful.

There are many ways that we can improve the legislative system, particularly at committee, while at the same time recognizing, as I have tried to do, the tremendous contributions by members from all sides of the House in their work, whether in their caucuses or in committee.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to comment on a few elements of the Speech from the Throne. I will not be able to cover everything but there are a few things that are of interest to me and to my party that I will speak to this afternoon.

The first thing of interest had to do with the mention in the throne speech of the government's initiative with respect to the free trade area of the Americas and the upcoming summit of the Americas in Quebec City in April 2001.

The thing we found distressing, apart from our fundamental disagreement with the economic theory and paradigm represented by not just the free trade area of the Americas but by other free trade agreements, like the North American Free Trade Agreement and the WTO, was the total lack of understanding in the throne speech with respect to the concerns that so many Canadians have about the threat that these agreements pose to democracy. This was reinforced yesterday when my leader asked a question of the Prime Minister with respect to Quebec City and his answer was that he did not know there were any problems.

Surely there is a problem. The Prime Minister does not have to agree necessarily with all the people who are unhappy with the free trade area of the Americas and free trade agreements. He does not have to agree with everything that people who are intending to go to Quebec City to protest have to say, but he could at least acknowledge that they exist and that they have some legitimate concerns.

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I recall, at the time of the meetings in Seattle, President Clinton, even though he was obviously unhappy about the protests, at least tipping his hat to the fact that he thought that people who were concerned about trying to integrate labour and environmental standards and a number of other things into these trade agreements had a point and a legitimate concern. However, we never get that kind of response from the Liberal government.

Yesterday we could see the potential for a replay of the APEC thing in Vancouver shaping up already. The Prime Minister making little of or showing no consideration for the situation that many people find themselves in when they are trying to make known their opposition to these agreements.

We remember the peppergate scandal and the comments the Prime Minister made in a very flippant way about what happened to some of the protesters in Vancouver. I do not recall him having anything to say about Seattle, but we know that as we speak they are building a wall around Quebec City. It might even be completed. They are also creating special jail cells in anticipation of multiple arrests of protesters who will be trying to make their voices heard.

• (1335)

I stand here today not in defence of violent protest but in defence of peaceful protest. What happened in Seattle and a number of other places is that peaceful protesters have been arrested and incarcerated for various lengths of time. It seems that this is the path that our own government is now on, and the Prime Minister is not even willing to acknowledge that there is a problem. I think that is very unfortunate.

It would have been much better for the Prime Minister to have said that he understood the many concerns about these free trade agreements. He could have then put his own position forward and given his reasons for thinking the concerns were unfounded or how the government intends to meet those concerns, but there has been no acknowledgement whatsoever. find that to be a real absence of leadership on the part of the Prime Minister. One of the roles of leadership in the country is to acknowledge the different opinions. One can take a side but one must also acknowledge the concerns of other people.

We are talking about a lot of young people who are very idealistic. They have been taught since they were knee high to a grasshopper that they live in a democracy, that the people who make decisions are the people who are elected by the people of the country.

They see more and more trade agreements being signed and planned, as is the case with the FTA, agreements which remove power from various elected national and subnational legislatures, whether they be parliaments, the national assembly in Quebec or the provincial legislatures. They see that more and more policy

choices and options, which used to be available to elected persons, are no longer available. There are certain things we could do with respect to magazines, to drug patent legislation, to water exports and to environmental regulations that we cannot do any more. The list goes on and on of things that legislators once could do but which have now been struck down, not by some democratically elected world body but by a trade agreement and its enforcers.

Is it so wrong, is it something to be ridiculed that young people from one end of the country to the other are saying that they are worried. Should we mock them for being concerned about democracy? Should we not even acknowledge their concerns in a major political statement such as the throne speech? That is what the government did when it mentioned the FTAA twice, I believe. In neither paragraph did it even acknowledge that there were legitimate concerns that Canadians had about these agreements. This is from a party that made a political career prior to 1993 about expressing those very same concerns when it was in opposition and opposed to the FTA and sort of opposed to NAFTA.

By that time, we were starting to get the drift of where the Liberals really were at. Some of us, of course, knew even in 1988 that the majority of them, with the exception of their leader, Mr. Turner, were really on side with the ideology of the FTA.

We are very concerned about what we see here in the government. We see a wilful ignorance, I believe, with respect to the concerns that so many Canadians have about these agreements. An even more worrisome thing is the growing incidence of what I would call and what some others have called, the criminalization of dissent, particularly when that dissent is expressed on the streets in the form of peaceful protests.

This is something we ought to be very worried about if we want to continue to call ourselves a full and healthy democracy: that we are preparing to treat these international gatherings as some sort of gated political communities, political compounds in which things happen and happen only among those who have credentials. People who do not have the credentials and are not part of the special community are kept out. They cannot even be on the street outside the building. They have to be 10 miles away. They cannot even be seen. This is a very disturbing trend indeed.

• (1340)

It relates to other things that are being said these days about parliamentary reform. I find it odd that we can spend so much time talking about parliamentary reform. This is not to say that we will get parliamentary reform, but we have spent a lot of time talking about it, without addressing the fact that one of the things that has happened to parliament over the last several years, particularly since 1988, is that more and more of the power that parliament used to have has been abdicated and diverted.

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I say to my friends on my right in the Canadian Alliance, as I have said at a conference that was sponsored in Edmonton last year or perhaps in the fall of 1999 with respect to the empowering of MPs, that often we hear about the problem of the courts deciding things that should be properly decided in parliament. I think that is a legitimate concern. It is a concern that I share to some degree, not entirely, but in some instances.

People who are concerned about parliamentary power being diverted to the courts should also be concerned about parliamentary power being diverted to the WTO or to the free trade agreements, which are reaching far deeper into the domestic policy making process than ever reached by the previous GATT or previously contemplated free trade agreements.

Free trade agreements of old had to do with the elimination of tariffs. These agreements have to do with investment policy, regulation of investment, energy, culture and natural resources. They have to do with all kinds of things that previous more traditional free trade agreements did not touch on.

We will learn to our great discomfort in the next few years, when some people find out as some of us knew all along, that we will not be able to have the kind of energy policy in Canada that we would like to have because we have signed away our power to have an energy policy in Canada to the free trade agreements.

As the prices of natural gas, oil and home heating fuel and everything else go up, people will ask why certain things cannot be done. The answer is consistently that we cannot do that because that would be against the free trade agreement and we cannot do this because that would be against the free trade agreement.

In 1988 some of us said that it might look all right at the moment with respect to energy, but there will come a day when we will want to have a certain amount of power over our own resources with respect to pricing, export and even distribution, and we will not have that power because of the things that were written into the agreement. It is interesting that we should be in this position now.

I will touch on another matter of great concern to the constituents of all members of parliament, that is the price of home heating fuel and gasoline. The phone is ringing off the hook in my constituency office with respect to the whole question of how the government's one time home heating fuel rebate is being administered.

I suppose we could say in some respects it was a good idea. It was a recognition of the problem that people would have come the winter, given the high cost of home heating fuel. However, linking it to the GST tax credit or linking its distribution or its eligibility to those who receive the GST tax credit in my judgment is now creating a great deal of confusion and resentment.

There is something wrong when one family looks at another and says that it is struggling but did not get the rebate the other family

did, or when people who do not even pay heating bills are getting the rebate by virtue of the fact that they qualify for the GST tax credit.

• (1345)

There is something quite disturbing going on out there. Looking at it from an administrative point of view it is not just in terms of bad policy. My real concern is that it is actually turning Canadians against each other. I do not like it when people phone my office saying that a person is getting something and they are not getting it. It is a policy that is actually causing Canadians to be angry, resentful or covetous. It is divisive.

I urge the government to reconsider the policy and look at ways of either broadening the base by making it universal, or at least finding ways to broaden or administer it in a way that does not create the kinds of problems that are obvious to anyone who has talked to their constituency assistant lately. I think all members would find themselves in that category.

It may differ in intensity from constituency to constituency and perhaps even from region to region, but I think it is a problem that all of us are experiencing. In the next little while all of us will have to deal with the high cost of energy and how the government deals with it. We were spared that dilemma or policy problem in the 1990s. It is not something that we will be spared in the early part of the decade.

Going back to the free trade agreement of the Americas, we have indicated our intention to be in solidarity with those people who will be expressing their concerns about that agreement. In the past we have been the only party in the House of Commons to oppose the multilateral agreement on investment, which fortunately never happened, and to other free trade agreements which unfortunately did happen.

I heard my colleague from the Bloc saying that I was not quite right when I talked about the MAI, but at the risk of provoking a debate with members I know one member of the Bloc has been concerned about globalization, to the point where he felt motivated to depart the Chamber with his chair.

It is a fact that these free trade agreements are in place in Canada because of the support they received in Quebec from sovereignists. Jacques Parizeau said over and over again, as recently as a week or so ago, that the free trade agreement was an instrument for Quebec sovereignty. He knew, in a way that Conservatives did not and Liberals used to but now willingly close their eyes, that the free trade agreement and the policy package that came with it in terms of privatization and deregulation has so weakened Canada that it makes it more vulnerable to the kind of plan that Mr. Parizeau has for Canada. That of course is its dismembering.

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It may be that the sovereigntist threat in Quebec is weak at this point for a variety of other reasons, but there is no question that the free trade agreements were seen by sovereigntists and separatists as creating a context in which it would be easier for Quebec to separate. The east-west ties would be broken and more things would be north-south, and the argument for having to remain in Canada would be weaker.

I am glad to see that members of the Bloc are coming along on the issue. If they are concerned about sovereignty there is no point in arguing about the sovereignty of Quebec if at the same time they are uncritical about trade agreements that are reducing the sovereignty of all legislatures, whether they be national or subnational or subnational legislatures that would like to be national.

I welcome the evolution in the consciousness of members of the Bloc Quebecois. I hope at some point they might be full partners with us in opposition to these trade agreements, but they will never be full partners with us until they are attached to the country the way we are.

• (1350)

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many of us on this side of the House who have great sympathy with the comment of the member for Winnipeg—Transcona when he said that the fuel rebate should not be tied to the GST.

I too am receiving many calls in my riding and it is a very divisive issue. The finance minister would do well to listen to the words of the member opposite and perhaps reconsider how that program is administered.

I would like to pose a question to the member opposite. He was referring to the problem of security at the upcoming summit in Quebec and how that sends a wrong message to young people who want to legitimately protest. All of us on this side agree that young people should protest. There are things to protest about the world trade agreements, and it is good that young people should be involved.

I well remember about a year and a half ago that there was a rally for the homeless just outside the House on the lawn in front of the Centre Block put on by the Coalition Against Poverty. The police were deployed in great numbers and cautioned us in the House to leave by a side door. We went out by a side door, but I was interested and I went and looked at the rally. There were hundreds of people there, mostly burly guys in boots. There were no homeless people there.

When the leader of the Conservative Party tried to walk into that crowd in order to speak to them, they swore at him and roughed him up. There was a similar protest with the Quebec Federation of Labour in which a hired protester tried to get through the security cordon of the Prime Minister.

Is it not true that this type of protest gangsterism spoils it for the young people who do want to legitimately protest? We have to put on security. Is it not true that the people who should really be condemned are groups like the Coalition Against Poverty?

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether the hon. member is saying he thinks there are no burly homeless people or no homeless people with boots. I was not there that day and do not have a great deal of knowledge of the particular event. I was very careful in my remarks to talk about peaceful protests.

In Seattle, it was not just violent protesters who were locked up. The police decided they would clear whole areas of the city and make them uninhabitable for peaceful protesters as well as violent protesters. They locked a lot of people up. They seem to be planning to do the same in Quebec City. That is my concern.

There were 50,000 people marching in Seattle: environmentalists, trade unionists and food safety activists. The event was supervised by the steelworkers. There were no police visible. It was all done in a very civilized and peaceful way. That kind of thing will not be possible in Quebec City if a wall is built around it.

The Berlin Wall has come down, but walls are going up everywhere so that people who want to gather together to plot the weakening of democracy through further free trade agreements can meet without having to hear the voices of protesters.

It has something to do with distance as well. Protesters have to be seen and heard, not just on the other side of the Ottawa River. These are legitimate concerns and one can voice them without being put in the position of somehow defending violence or inappropriate responses.

Of course we must have security. There is a need for the protection of delegates to these meetings and the protection of property. There is also a role for government in acknowledging these concerns and dealing with them, which the government has not been willing to do.

I know the government says it had a parliamentary subcommittee and it heard testimony. That is not good enough. We have to open these processes and make some of these negotiating papers public.

• (1355)

Yesterday the Minister for International Trade said that all we had to do was look on the Internet. If we look on the Internet, we will not find the Canadian position with respect to the general agreement on trade and services which is of great concern to many Canadians in terms of what might happen to our health and education services.

The minister stood yesterday and told us to look it up on our website. We did look it up and were concerned about what it says

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on the website, that Canada has no position in this regard. We know Canada has a position. We know Canadian negotiators are probably in rooms negotiating as we speak. Yet for them to pretend they have no position while at the same time telling us to look it up is somewhat frustrating.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your recent appointment. We are honoured to be able to have someone of your ability in the chair.

I congratulate my colleague, the House leader for the NDP. Whenever he has an opportunity to speak, he is worth listening to because he makes thoughtful and reflective comments which add to the debate, no matter what the topic. I congratulate him on that.

My question for the House leader of the New Democratic Party would be in regard to the main issue of his speech. He talked about many things, but I am referring to the ability to debate democratically and protest in a peaceful way. I agree with him on that. He also mentioned free trade agreements, the FTA and NAFTA.

Would he provide, with his insight, his solution or the NDP solution in terms of where to go now, the integration of those agreements and the economies that have developed under those agreements? What is his vision or his party's vision to move ahead and make changes, if necessary, in that area?

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question is obviously a lot longer than what we have time for at the moment. I would say for a start that one of the things we should not do is move ahead with further free trade agreements until we have satisfied ourselves and the critics of these agreements that they can deal with such problems as labour standards, environment standards, et cetera.

There should be a moratorium on trade and investment liberalization until we are satisfied that we can have agreements which do not inhibit the power of governments to act in the public interest.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

TED THORNLEY

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on December 15, 2000, the Waterloo Regional Police Association lost its leader of 12 years. Members of the Thornley family lost a husband, father and son who loved them very much. I lost a trusted adviser, constituent and friend, and my community lost a dedicated and decent citizen.

Known to many as chairman of the Police Association of Ontario and a member of the Canadian Police Association, Ted Thornley worked actively to improve public safety in the country. He worked tirelessly to ensure that police officers in the region and province were always taken care of.

Ted had an ability to be serious, humorous and compassionate. I ask his family, Karen, Vicki, Keri and Jamie, to accept my deepest condolences. Ted Thornley was a great man and he will be truly missed.

* * *

SPORTS

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, for the third consecutive week the Red Deer Rebels of the Major Junior Western Hockey League have been ranked number one in our nation. The Rebels have worked extremely hard to obtain this number one ranking and should be very proud of themselves.

The Rebels solid work ethic starts from the top with their coach, Brent Sutter. Brent and his assistant, Dallas Gaume, have done a fantastic job in bringing out the best of these talented players.

The Red Deer Rebels are an outstanding organization. The hockey club is very active in central Alberta and supports many worthwhile causes. These young people work with the youth in our community and truly are excellent role models for the next generation.

● (1400)

As the member of parliament for Red Deer, I am proud of the Rebels in our community. Obviously the ultimate goal for the Rebels is a trip to the Memorial Cup in Regina this spring.

By continuing their excellent play we are confident they will succeed. They have many best wishes from the entire community for the achievement of this goal.

* * *

CITIZENS OF THE YEAR

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month the city of Hamilton paid tribute to three outstanding citizens in the 63rd annual Distinguished Citizen of the Year awards.

Aimee Evans won the Community Service Award, Laura Donahoe received the Youth Volunteer Award, and Morgan Firestone, a well-known philanthropist in our community, was named Citizen of the Year.

The winners of these awards did not become active in our community to win awards. They did so to make Hamilton and Canada a better place to live. They all contribute to the community in different ways but with the same goal: a desire to improve our community and continue Canada's tradition of helping those in need.

I am sure all hon. members will join me in congratulating these three outstanding citizens and in wishing them continued success in the future. At the same time, I would also like to recognize all Canadians who make a difference in their communities through public service.

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[Translation]

FRONTENAC-MÉGANTIC

Mr. Gérard Binet (Frontenac—Mégantic, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on November 27, the voters of Frontenac—Mégantic expressed their confidence in me by electing me to the House of Commons, and I would like to thank them most sincerely.

This confidence is the product of a vision of courage resolutely turned towards the future, which, in turn, will motivate me to work on behalf of the men, women and children of the four corners of the riding of Frontenac—Mégantic.

I intend, in all humility and with unwavering conviction, to strengthen our ability to work together to develop a vision for Frontenac—Mégantic.

I am therefore very proud to be part of a team with a vision for success, a most exciting challenge. Thank you again to my electors.

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[English]

SPORTS

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, on November 26 the BC Lions defeated the Montreal Alouettes and brought the Grey Cup home to British Columbia. It was a special time for many of my constituents who watch the Lions practise and scrimmage on a regular basis, since the team office and training facility are located in Surrey North. Fans have waited a number of years for this and, after an incredible late season kick, the Lions delivered the ultimate prize.

While on the subject of kicks, I pay a warm and special tribute to Lui Passaglia who, after gracing the gridirons of the CFL for 25 years as kicker for the Lions, hung up the cleats for the last time. How fitting it was that the final field goal of his long, illustrious career provided his team with the winning margin for the Grey Cup victory.

Congratulations to the front office, the coaches and especially the players of the BC Lions, and a special thank you to Lui for his quarter century of commitment to the game. The Lions will continue to roar, but one thing that will be missed will be the thousands of voices chanting in unison, “Lu, Lu, Lu”, as another three points go up on the scoreboard.

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BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Jean Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February, Black History Month, aims to raise awareness of the contributions of black Canadians to the fabric of Canadian society.

An effective tool is the annual Black History Month poster. This year the poster is entitled “Contributions Worth Remembering and Sharing”. It features: members of the No. 2 Construction Battalion, the first and only all black battalion in Canadian military history; William Peyton Hubbard, Canada’s first black alderman; Delos Rogest Davis, Canada’s first black lawyer; the Brown Bombers, an all black Canadian hockey team; and Portia White, Canadian soloist extraordinaire.

Today the poster will be presented to the Prime Minister and other dignitaries. I would like to congratulate Teresa Valladeres, the designer, and Stephan Taylor, the artist, as well as Rick Gosling, the city of Toronto, Toronto Fire Services, the North York Race Relations Committee, the RCMP and the Toronto Police Services for supporting and participating in this venture.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have just returned from heading the Canadian delegation to the Stockholm International Forum, whose purpose included the legal, educational, media and community strategies needed to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and related forms of intolerance.

In particular, the conference concluded that, first, this growing intolerance constitutes a threat to democratic societies and a variety of legal remedies is needed to combat it. An international commission of what the Swedish prime minister called “global legal talent” is being set up to draft model legal remedies.

● (1405)

Second, hate on the Internet, particularly the cyber hate targeting and recruiting of children, has proliferated from one hate site in 1995 to over 2,500 today, requiring creative responses.

Third, racist, xenophobic and exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants, refugees, migrant workers and minorities, as well as the discrimination and denigration of l'étrangère, need to be combated.

Fourth, an educational strategy to combat intolerance is needed, organized around holocaust, anti-racist, multicultural and human rights awareness.

The time has come, concluded the forum, to move from words to deeds.

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INTERNATIONAL AID

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the official opposition caucus to send our condolences to India and El Salvador. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and families impacted by two devastating earthquakes.

I would like to acknowledge the work of countless volunteers involved with local relief efforts as well as the Government of Canada's contributions.

My office in Calgary, in conjunction with local societies, is organizing fundraising efforts for victims in India. I urge Canadians today to contribute generously to ongoing relief efforts and give whatever they can for victims in India and El Salvador. Your generosity can make a difference.

* * *

[Translation]

HEART DISEASE

Mr. Yvon Charbonneau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House and the people of Canada that February is heart disease awareness month.

[English]

We are proud of the Canadian heart health initiative, a multi-level collaboration encouraging Canadians to adopt healthy lifestyles and to create working and living conditions conducive to healthy choices.

[Translation]

Each year, some 79,000 Canadians die from heart disease or stroke. This is a huge loss for Canada.

Great progress has been made, but there is still a long way to go in the fight to reduce the major risk factors, such as smoking, hypertension, high cholesterol and diabetes.

[English]

The quality of life of a myriad of Canadians will be enormously improved, but we as Canadians must choose to invest in heart health by mobilizing society as a whole.

* * *

[Translation]

LUCIEN BOUCHARD

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, recently the Premier of Quebec, Lucien Bouchard, announced his decision to retire from politics. Quebec is losing a politician of inestimable value and a great visionary.

His political career was marked by charisma and a great talent for defending a cause; this is what made him a great statesman.

Mr. Bouchard was the incarnation of modern Quebec. He demonstrated to us that one could govern with passion, intelligence and audacity. He was never afraid to act according to his political convictions.

With his knowledge of the Canadian system, he understood that Quebec needed to become sovereign. It is to him we owe the founding of the Parti Québécois, and it is thanks to him that Quebecers are now represented and defended here in the House of Commons.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois MPs, thank you, Mr. Bouchard, for your commitment and your contribution to the development of Quebec society.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last December 29, a young Canadian of Burundian origin, Arthur Kabunda, was killed in an ambush in Burundi. This tragedy got no Canadian media coverage whatsoever, nor did the government speak out against this attack.

On January 24, his fellow students at the community college in Bathurst, New Brunswick, paid tribute to Mr. Kabunda.

I wish to pay tribute to a peerless student and a citizen of this country who was a victim of war.

I call upon representatives of the government, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister, to extend sincere condolences to the family and friends of Mr. Kabunda and to make a greater commitment to restoring world peace.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

BANK OF CANADA

Mr. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance. Yesterday marked Gordon Thiessen's last day at the Bank of Canada after more than 30 years of service, including the last 7 as governor.

[Translation]

It was said, appropriately so, that Mr. Thiessen fulfilled his mandate with distinction and achieved extraordinary success. During the seven years he was in charge of Canada's monetary policy, our economy experienced one of its greatest periods of growth.

Mr. Thiessen's determination to make Canada a low inflation country was known worldwide and it largely contributed to the solid growth that we have been enjoying recently.

[English]

Mr. Thiessen is replaced today by another very distinguished Canadian, David Dodge, who has committed to continue to build upon the success of his predecessor.

I ask all members and all Canadians to join me in thanking Governor Thiessen for his years of service and in congratulating David Dodge on his new duties.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister and the finance minister stated that our economy is doing just fine and that action is not required now and will only be taken if necessary.

However, this morning's StatsCan figures for November show zero growth and we are hearing of thousands of layoffs at Nortel and DaimlerChrysler, among others. Americans have adjusted their interest rates to try to counter the slowing of the U.S. economy.

[Translation]

We have now lost the glorious Montreal Canadiens because taxes are too high and the Canadian dollar is too weak.

[English]

Yesterday we lost a national symbol of pride, the Montreal Canadiens, to American interests, due largely to high taxes and the weak dollar policies of this government.

Canadians understand the need for a budget. Members of the opposition understand the need for a budget. Liberal backbenchers understand the need for a budget. The time for action is now. We need a budget.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Antarctica contains 90% of the world's freshwater resources. It controls global climate and is the last wilderness on earth. It is a platform for sustainable research.

Antarctica is governed by a treaty that protects it and sets a framework for research. Twenty-eight nations have signed that treaty. Canada is not one of them.

What an extraordinary thing. We are a leading polar nation but we do not take a full share in the proper management of the world's largest piece of polar real estate.

S. O. 31

I believe we have a moral responsibility to sign the Antarctic treaty. Antarctica should benefit from Canada's cold environment expertise and northern Canadians should benefit from science and technology being developed in Antarctica.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canadian farmers are among the hardest working citizens in the country. Rarely do they get a holiday from the daily chores associated with providing the people of the nation with some of the safest and finest quality food in the world.

For them to take time away from the hectic pace of farm life, for them to leave their farms to trek to Ottawa not once but twice in just over a year, means that they have an important message: the Canadian family farm cannot survive, given the current conditions, without long term financial assistance.

Unfortunately that message was lost on the Liberal government the first time the farmers delivered it. Hopefully this time the government will finally get the message and deliver the much needed support that our farmers have been promised.

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL AID

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, a terrible earthquake hit northern India. The pictures that we see are unbearable and the information that we get gives only a vague idea of the extent of the tragedy.

According to the Red Cross, 50,000 people are dead, while the Indian defence minister puts the number of victims at 100,000. There are countless people who have been injured, left homeless and lost friends and relatives. The heat, the lack of sanitary infrastructures, the shortage of water and the presence of all these bodies pose a real threat of epidemics.

Material damage is estimated at \$3 billion, a huge sum for India, which is already plagued by endemic poverty.

The federal government has a responsibility to help this huge developing country. This is not charity—Indians are a proud people and they would not want charity—this is mutual aid and it is our duty to act. The \$3 million announced so far to help India should only be the first instalment of a much more substantial amount for reconstruction.

My friends, let us be generous.

Oral Questions

[English]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, among the many problems we have with the government, and in particular with its latest Speech from the Throne, are its lack of consistency and its approach of all talk and no action.

• (1415)

Nowhere is it more apparent than today with the news that tobacco marketers are being included in the official team Canada trade mission to China, a country where 800,000 people die each year from tobacco related illnesses.

How is this possible from a government and a health minister that have talked so much about the serious ills of smoking? What kind of message does it send to young people, the very group the government says it wants to reach in terms of the harm of smoking? Is the government's health policy completely in the hands of the Minister of Industry? Do trade and industry run the whole show?

We call on the government to show consistency and remind it that young people will learn from the actions of the government and act accordingly.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Prime Minister if he knew the cost of the promises made in the throne speech. He had no idea, but I hope and I am certain that his advisers have told him the amount.

I therefore ask him again: How much are his promises going to cost taxpayers?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition should know that the estimates are always tabled before the end of March for the fiscal year in question. Furthermore, if we were to give the exact cost now, it would show a lack of respect for the House of Commons, because the House can amend bills at the various stages.

In any event, I was particularly pleased yesterday to note that the Leader of the Opposition agreed with all the government's proposed expenditures on research and development, the infrastructure program, the program for children and so forth.

[English]

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I can put him at ease. We will not be affronted at all or insulted if he gives us information, information that should be provided in a budget which he is not tabling.

The International Monetary Fund released a report today based on data from last year's budget and from the October teeny budget which made some suggestions. Since then the former chief economist at the Royal Bank of Canada, now a Liberal MP, seemed to agree that the Liberal's spending increases could run us into a deficit.

Since the IMF analysis, the growth has been projected at 0.1% in Canada and 0% in the United States. Where is the plan from the government? Where is the budget? Is it trying to hide this information?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that the leader of the Alliance has taken note of the IMF report, which is based on work finalized in the third week of January or about 10 days ago. It reads:

The IMF staff commends the (Canadian) authorities for the comprehensive income tax reforms and reductions introduced in the 2000 budget and in the October 2000 economic statement and fiscal update and strongly endorses the fiscal policy framework that has been put in place.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we will read back and forth because it says based on budget 2000 and on the October update. That is what it is based on.

Since then the reports have come out showing 0.1% growth in November. Forty-three per cent of manufacturers in Canada, not in the International Monetary Fund, now say that they will be reducing for this next quarter.

The Prime Minister does not care. He does not know. I will ask the Minister of Industry, one of his possible successors, if he is concerned about this possible direction.

• (1420)

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Industry and the whole government, allow me to quote again from the IMF report, which as I mentioned was only finalized some 10 days ago. It reads:

The strong policy framework in place has positioned the real and financial economy (in Canada) to cope with any new major economic shock, including a slowdown in U.S. growth. The Canadian authorities are to be highly commended for their policy accomplishments.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: Order, please. I know that both the questions and answers are generating a lot of enthusiasm, but I caution hon.

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members that we have a limit on question period time and I think we should move more quickly.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it looks like gentlemen start your engines, the race is on. It is really not that complicated. Things did look better in the fall when the government brought forward its plan. It brought forward a financial plan based on certain assumptions.

Those assumptions have now changed. The government should be tabling a new budget now, not down the road when things get worse. It is a question of prudence. I am sure the government understands that. What part of prudence is the Prime Minister objecting to?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt—

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien: Talk about pension reform.

Hon. Paul Martin: Yes, I guess I could do that. The Canadian government in its projections has been prudent and that is why Canada will be able to weather the storm.

I congratulate the member opposite for her prudence in saving up for her pension.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: The Chair would appreciate more co-operation, given the time element.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, if only I could plan for pension reform by registering my ships off country, it would be a great thing.

Surely the government knows that this was based on budget 2000 and the mini-budget that was purely for election purposes in October. That is what it was based on.

The economy grew in Canada by 0.1%. Almost half of Canadian manufacturers are scaling back. This is not happy news. These are warning signs in Canada but the government refuses to act.

Why will the Prime Minister not simply reassure Canadian families and working people and table a budget soon?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the financial plan indicated very well that we were very prudent to have a mini-budget in October so that the tax cuts would be in place in Canada for January 1, 2001.

Of course the Minister of Finance, myself and all the government are watching the situation very closely, but all indications are that the Canadian economy will outperform any competitors in the OECD next year because we were prudent to have a budget in October and of course an election in November.

[Translation]

LUMBER INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, as we know, the Minister for International Trade met with representatives of the Canadian Alliance on the subject of lumber trade.

For many years now, the Quebec forest industry has paid a heavy price for the subsidies paid in British Columbia. This situation cannot continue as far as Quebec is concerned.

Does the minister agree with all the stakeholders attending this meeting, including those from British Columbia, who want a return to the full application of the free trade agreement?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted by the question put by the leader of the Bloc Québécois on the subject of lumber, an extremely important issue.

I can assure you that I met with a number of representatives of the provinces, including Quebec. I also met industry representatives.

• (1425)

I can assure members that we are all working together and that a broad consensus is forming across the country in favour of free trade in lumber. Therefore, we are working closely with the industry across the country, with each of the provinces. There is no question of returning to the agreement we had in recent years.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell us whether the government has a strategy for negotiations with the American government to ensure the States does not apply any sanctions immediately after the return to the free trade agreement, which would considerably harm the entire lumber industry?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the moment we are not negotiating with the American government, but are having a fruitful and in depth dialogue.

As we know, no new American trade representative has been confirmed in Washington yet. This should happen imminently.

We have already had discussions and we are awaiting this official's confirmation. I can assure the House that all measures have been taken to ensure this dialogue is successful and leads to healthy trade relations, because the Americans need the Canadian industry's lumber.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thousands of jobs and hundreds of companies in the softwood lumber industry are hard hit by the quotas which have been unfairly imposed on Quebec, while subsidies were being handed out by the Govern-

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ment of British Columbia. Quebec, however, does not offer such subsidies and should not have to suffer as a result.

In the event of American sanctions, will the Minister for International Trade undertake to compensate Canadian and Quebec producers financially and to provide them with legal support before the NAFTA dispute panel?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating the member for Joliette on his election to the House of Commons, and on the confidence his leader has shown in him by appointing him to the important position of international trade critic.

I would assure the member that if there is one industry among those covered by the agreement that has experienced significant growth, it is the one in Quebec, whose share of the American market has now grown to 25%, compared to 20% to 21% a few years ago.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would point out to the minister that in the case of New Brunswick, which does not come under the agreement, growth was much greater.

But, whatever the outcome of the negotiations now under way with the Americans, can the Minister for International Trade guarantee that Quebec lumber producers will never again have to suffer because of subsidies given to other producers, such as those in British Columbia, as has too long been the case?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Joliette should think very carefully before accusing other provinces of engaging in practices the Canadian government does not believe they are engaged in.

I think that, throughout Canada, we have made considerable progress with respect to trade practices. I think that the Government of British Columbia is taking its responsibilities seriously. I also think that we should all stand together, that Canada's practice of having rights and Crown lands is our way of doing things.

We will continue to have a Canadian way of doing things, and, if that does not suit the United States, we are still going to insist on the right to manage our natural resources as we see fit in our country, in terms of commercial rights.

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[English]

TRADE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Yesterday the Prime Minister said he was unaware of any problems with the FTAA. Claiming that Canada's position is totally transparent, the government referred us to the website.

Guess what the website says, Mr. Speaker: Canada has made no submissions to the negotiating group on services, yet a secret report of that same group chaired by Canada recommends throwing all public services, including health and education, into the free marketplace. If that is not Canada's position then what is?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, there is a rumour that we do not want to protect, for example, the five conditions of medicare in this negotiation. It is a rumour started by people in the hon. member's party or by its friends, but it is not true at all.

• (1430)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister cannot be open with Canadians will he at least pledge to be direct with the Americans?

Next week the Prime Minister goes to the U.S. Will he promise the House that he will look President Bush straight in the eye and state unequivocally that Canada's health care, education and water resources will not be on the table at the Quebec summit on the FTAA?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear on that for many years and it has been agreed that is the position of Canada.

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BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BANK OF CANADA

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister concerning a senior official of a crown corporation.

Does the Prime Minister know and can he tell the House if the senior vice-president for corporate affairs at the Business Development Bank, a Mr. Jean Carle, played an active role in the support of a political party during the campaign for the November 27 election?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, Mr. Carle is a very well known Liberal. As a citizen he has the right to help in an election, as do other people in the public service.

The law of the land states that public servants cannot be deprived from working on an election, but that they cannot do it on company time or government time. They must take holiday time, which is exactly what Mr. Carle did.

*Oral Questions***AGRICULTURE**

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister said that his first order of business when discussing business with President Bush would be the unfair American agriculture subsidies.

Will the Prime Minister state to the House today that if the president refuses to remove those unfair subsidies that he will increase financial assistance to Canadian producers?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I clearly said that it was the wish of the government and the House of Commons that I express to the president of the United States that a war on subsidies between countries on agriculture is counterproductive. I will tell him that very clearly.

We have often said that we cannot compete and do not have the means to compete with the Americans and the Europeans in a war like that. We are not big enough. We have to convince them to do the right thing and make sure that there is a possibility for everyone to compete together on a fair basis.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Ontario Provincial Police have flatly contradicted the Minister of Foreign Affairs' statements that his department did not know about the drunk driving history of Russian diplomat, Mr. Knyazev.

Yesterday we also raised the issue of a letter that went to Mr. Knyazev in which foreign affairs apologized for his treatment by the police following his previous drunk driving conviction.

A day has now passed. Would the minister please clear up both of these issues for us?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I can confirm that there was an exchange of diplomatic notes between Canada and Russia with respect to this individual. However, what is really important here and what would disturb me and the hon. member very deeply is if there were information that ought to have led to this individual being forced to leave Canada before he was involved in the accident.

I do not have information that was the case, but I am asking for a thorough investigation to ensure that in fact was not the case. I also want to ensure that diplomats involved with impaired driving offences do not drive again in Canada.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate that assurance and we certainly take the minister at his word.

It is my understanding that the Ontario Provincial Police have in fact the names of people in foreign affairs who received documents indicating that Mr. Knyazev had been stopped. I trust the minister will discover that himself by talking with the Ontario Provincial Police. I would expect also that if he finds that, that the people in foreign affairs, who obviously messed up, will also pay a price. I want that assurance from the minister now.

• (1435)

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, seeking the information is very much the first step in this process and one that I will certainly engage in personally and rapidly.

I am also very concerned by suggestions that there may be differing views between the protocol office and the Ontario Provincial Police about the matter of co-ordinating, having the police in and making sure that everyone understands what the principles are of immunity.

However, fundamentally diplomats are here to serve their countries and not to put Canadians citizens at risk. That is what the result of the process needs to be.

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[Translation]

ECONOMIC STATEMENT

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has said there would be no budget this winter. Fine, but he needs to recognize that a budget is an opportunity, not just to announce budgetary measures, but also to present up to date financial and economic data in order to provide people with some idea of the current situation and of future prospects.

Since, in the past, the Minister of Finance has been way off in his forecasts and does not exactly have top marks on his report card with a record of a 120% forecast error rate, will he not agree that he has an urgent obligation to present a true and carefully prepared economic statement?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the hon. member is blaming me for being overly cautious. Sometimes caution may be a good thing.

I can tell him that we have always, as hon. members are well aware, based our actions on a consensus of private sector forecasters and we will soon be getting their forecasts.

As I have always said, if another economic statement or other forecast, as the circumstances dictate, is appropriate, then we shall have one.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for the past few days the minister has not stopped telling us that

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Canada is not affected by the downturn in the United States. It may be a little hard to believe him, but we would love to.

Can he acknowledge his duty to make public all of the base data, the hypotheses, his own forecasts, in short all pertinent data, so that we may make a judgment on the current situation and on future prospects, instead of merely trusting him blindly?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that I did not say Canada would not be affected by events in the United States. We are certainly going to be affected. Moreover, the U.S. accounts for close to 25% of the world economy, so we are not alone in that.

What I did say was that Canada is in a far better position today than it has ever been to deal with this turbulence.

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[*English*]

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, unlike law-abiding Canadian citizens who pay for their seminars and other such courses, Correctional Service Canada is shelling out \$1 million a year to parole criminals to attend various courses in the form of attendance fees; \$5 for each time they show up.

I quote one prison official who says “It is a small price to pay. It is a drop in the hat”. I would like to ask the solicitor general whether he thinks that this \$1 million in attendance fees is a drop in the hat.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the \$5 is for bus fare for prisoners after they leave prison to be able to attend courses and be rehabilitated back into society. I am sure my hon. colleague is interested in public safety. If not, this government is.

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, he actually has not gotten the answer right because that is not quite the way it is. This is classic liberalism. It is like sending a child to his or her room for doing something bad and then paying him or her five bucks to make sure he goes.

I will quote another prison official, “The \$1 million expenditure is worth it even if our department is unable to gauge its success”.

Since the solicitor general is spending a million bucks and he is unable to gauge its success, how many other courses in the prison system is he spending millions of dollars on with no idea as to whether or not they are successful?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am fully aware that our rehabilitation programs are successful.

When people commit a crime in this country they are assessed, punished for their crime and then rehabilitated. Surely my hon. colleague realizes that those are the appropriate steps to take for public safety.

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• (1440)

[*Translation*]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne is full of examples of planned federal intrusion into provincial jurisdictions.

How can the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs justify that, from now on, the federal government intends to get involved in literacy, since education comes under the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces? Does the government not have anything better to do than to generate confusion in an area that clearly does not come under its jurisdiction?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I could summarize the Speech from the Throne in one sentence, it would be: innovation, inclusion without intrusion. There is no intrusion whatsoever and the hon. member would not be able to provide any example.

Still, I congratulate him on his first question. He referred to literacy, a program set up in 1988 by then Secretary of State Lucien Bouchard.

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if I had to summarize the Speech from the Throne it would be: infringement on provincial jurisdictions, establishment of a citizens’ council, home care, dropouts and literacy. These are just a few examples of infringement on provincial jurisdictions.

Is it not a despicable form of blackmail on the part of this government to threaten to cut funds for education if the provinces do not opt for the priorities set by Ottawa, set by the minister?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing unconstitutional in the Speech from the Throne. We will fully respect, as we always have, the provinces’ responsibilities, but we will ask that our own responsibilities also be respected. Above all, we will co-operate with the provinces, because this is what Canadians, including Quebecers, are asking us to do.

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this is what the member for Lac-Saint-Louis recently said about his own government, and I quote, “Being on the backbench we are all typecast as if we were all stupid. We are just supposed to be voting machines”. Well, hopes for real parliamentary reform were dashed in this latest throne speech when the Prime Minister’s promise was electronic voting.

Electronic voting will not reform parliament because it is not how fast MPs vote that counts. MPs want to vote freely without pressure from the Prime Minister’s office.

Will the Prime Minister take meaningful steps to allow his own backbenchers to vote not just faster but freer on government legislation?

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member no doubt listened to the throne speech and to the Prime Minister’s speech as attentively as I did. If so, he would know that the Prime Minister said that I would work together with House leaders of all other parties to extend further reforms of the parliamentary process. I am looking forward to that.

I can tell the House that I hope we do not have an exercise like we did when the Leader of the Opposition was the House leader in Alberta where he moved closure to shut down kindergartens.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, perhaps he could dig a little deeper in the binder and find out that the Leader of the Opposition was the only cabinet minister who stood and voted in favour of parliamentary reform in the Alberta legislature. He could look at that.

The member for Toronto—Danforth says that parliament does not work, that it is broken and that it is like a car running on two cylinders. The member for Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge says that parliament’s role is largely reduced to rubber stamping what government has already decided on.

If even Liberal backbenchers of parliament are begging for the chance to vote freely, not just on private members’ bills but on government legislation, does the Prime Minister really believe that electronic voting will satisfy his own members’ desires for free votes here in the House of Commons?

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it astonishing that the hon. member would be so terrified at modernizing the House of Commons with such things as electronic voting. Perhaps the real

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test will come when we modernize report stage of bills in order to make this parliament work in a way that is very functional.

Being the objective person that he is, I am sure he will want to work together with me, if not others in his party and others on this side of the House, to make this parliament even more meaningful.

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HEALTH

Mr. David Pratt (Nepean—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

Approximately 7,000 residents of Ottawa and eastern Ontario face waiting periods of up to eight to twelve months to receive an MRI because of a shortage of these vital pieces of diagnostic equipment in this part of the province.

● (1445)

What action is the minister taking to offer hope to those people who are currently waiting for an MRI in this region, since the government of Ontario seems completely unconcerned about the inequitable distribution of MRIs across the province?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is as deeply concerned as we all are on this side of the House with access to medical services in Canada. Working with our partners in the provincial governments who are responsible for delivering services, we are determined to achieve timely access to quality care for all Canadians.

In the case of Ontario we have acted recently in a very significant way. As a result of the agreement last September with the provinces, Ontario will receive in the course of the coming five years over \$40 billion in cash alone. Apart from that, there will be \$200 million for Ontario to encourage primary health care reform and almost \$400 million to enable Ontario to purchase new medical equipment such as MRIs.

We have now furnished the tools. Ontario must do the job.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. It has to do with the one time home heating fuel rebate announced in the mini-budget.

I am sure by now that the minister and many of his colleagues are aware of the unhappiness that this is causing in the country by virtue of the fact that there are so many people who need this rebate but do not qualify because of the particular way it has been administered through the GST tax credit.

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Is the Minister of Finance considering changes to this program so that many families who need this rebate but do not now qualify will in fact receive some help from the government?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will know that we wanted to get those cheques out as quickly as possible. Therefore it was important to find the most expeditious way possible, which was the low income credit.

That is why we proceeded in that way. Some 11 million Canadians who will be receiving \$1.3 billion.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I understand what the minister is saying. However, the fact is that a lot of people who are not paying heating bills are receiving it and struggling families who have high heating bills are not receiving it. This is creating a lot of resentment and division among Canadians. The government should consider a way of alleviating that.

We acknowledge the good the Minister of Finance has already done, but we also acknowledge some of the flaws. I think he should as well. What changes is he considering to this program so that families who are now struggling with high heating bills will get some aid from the government?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are obviously defects in a program in which one wanted to get the cheques out as quickly as possible and had to use an existing structure.

The fact is that it was the government's view to get those cheques out as quickly as possible to the vast majority of Canadians. The 11 million people who received them was by far the best way to go.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is now apparent that the Russian Embassy and the Department of Foreign Affairs knew of a long history of abusive and dangerous behaviour on behalf of a particular Russian diplomat. Yet nothing was done.

Will the Government of Canada spearhead an international initiative to change the rules of diplomatic immunity to stop protecting drunk and dangerous drivers?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I do not have evidence that is consistent with the preamble to the member's question that we had a long history of this behaviour by this individual. I assure him, as I did his colleague from the Alliance Party, that we will try to investigate that.

Second, I think it would be useful for us to discuss the rules of diplomatic immunity, although I do not believe they were intended to apply to a case such as this one. That is why we asked the

Russians for a waiver. It is very important that our diplomats have the protection of the Vienna convention, particularly those serving in some countries where respect for the rule of law is not as it is in Canada.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is now apparent that the present Russian ambassador knew that there were repeat offences. He has already confirmed his knowledge of previous incidents about this driver. He also knows there was abusive behaviour at the scene of the accident. He confirmed that.

The same ambassador gave wrong information at his press conference the other day relating to a crime that resulted in an innocent woman's death. Has the minister asked for the ambassador to be recalled to Russia?

• (1450)

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question is no. The priority we are placing on the completion of this matter at the present time is to ensure that the individual involved in this tragic accident is brought to justice. We sought and received very strong assurances from Russian authorities as high as the minister of foreign affairs that it will be the case.

I can assure the hon. member that as far as I am concerned the matter will not be complete until we see the judicial process in Russia take its course and we see this individual go to a cold place for as long as possible.

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want their members of parliament to have a meaningful role in the Parliament of Canada. In the last parliament, apart from renaming ridings, only two private members' bills sponsored by members of the House received royal assent. That is the worst track record in the last 20 years.

Will the Prime Minister commit to allowing all private members' bills to be votable in the House?

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not even sure the member's party advocates that position.

At present there are rules of the House that deal with which private members' bills are votable and which are not. There is a committee of parliament that recommends how to make changes to that. Thus far the committee has not recommended the change he is advocating.

Since 1993 there have been no less than 97 free votes on private members' bills and some government bills. That is probably greater than in the last 50 years combined.

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, only two of those bills received royal assent. That is the lowest in the last 20 years and that record cannot be changed.

In 1991 the Prime Minister, then leader of the opposition, in his reply to the Speech from the Throne said that he wanted more free votes in the House of Commons.

We have committees. All parties on this side of the House want reform to parliament. Will the government House leader commit to get this committee meeting right away, sitting down and talking about reform of the rules of the House?

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member is unaware but the motion to constitute the committee was adopted by the House two days ago and it can meet anytime it likes.

He referred to two private members' bills. The number is 19. I know he once served under the leadership of the right hon. leader of the Conservative Party. The hon member did not know how to count in 1979 when he was part of that caucus.

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[Translation]

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Ghislain Fournier (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the throne speech, the government announced its desire to enhance the standards for drinking water quality in Canada. In the des Plages sector of Sept-Îles, the Department of Transport has contaminated the source of its drinking water and has done nothing since to remedy the situation.

The people of Sept-Îles want to know why the Minister of Transport has been dragging his feet on this until now, and what he intends to do to remedy the harm to my fellow citizens he himself has caused?

[English]

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to the contrary, my officials have been working with affected residents in Sept-Îles to come up with an acceptable solution. In the meantime we have been providing bottled water to those residents. That is not an acceptable long term solution, but there are other remedies that are being tested and some of the residents have taken us up on those remedies.

The number of people affected is very small but they are very important obviously in terms of their numbers. It is a priority for us to determine a fair solution.

[Translation]

Mr. Ghislain Fournier (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government has announced all manner of interventions that do not

Oral Questions

fall within its areas of responsibility. Now we have the water contamination in the des Plages sector, which is its responsibility.

Why can the Minister of Transport not tell us exactly, several years after the fact, what he intends to do and when? It is his responsibility.

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already answered that question.

* * *

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food said the provinces were not doing enough to support farm families. The minister should stop worrying about what the provinces are doing and take immediate action to fulfil federal responsibilities.

• (1455)

This year's income for grain farmers will be 65% below the five year average. No other industry that suffered a 65% drop would be ignored by any government. Why will the government not offer immediate emergency assistance that will get to farmers before spring seeding?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has worked with the provinces. Last July I signed an agreement with all of the provinces which will mean that over the next three years \$5.5 billion in support will go to farmers.

We also put in place the spring advance which is interest free support to farmers and last year it was \$350 million across the country. That program will be in place again this year as will the other programs.

As I continue to say, I will continue to work on behalf of the farmers, as will the government, in seeking all the resources that we possibly can to support them.

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, maybe it is time the minister walked in the footsteps of those farmers and cut his salary by 65%.

The agriculture minister claims to guarantee that the help he promised over two years ago will get out. Unfortunately there will be far fewer farmers by the time this happens. If we neglect farmers now, our industry may be damaged to such an extent that Canada's natural competitive advantage will be lost.

I will ask my question one last time. Why will the minister not do the right thing and pledge immediate financial help before spring seeding? The AIDA program and all those other programs are not doing the job.

Points of Order

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I gather that is the hon. member's final question unless he wants to call someone.

The money is going out. I am guaranteed that the \$1.6 billion that we announced to the provinces for 1998-99 will go out. The support is there. We will continue to work on behalf of farmers.

The government's track record has shown to the best of the resources available to us that we are there for farmers. We understand the situation that a number of farmers are in. We will do all we can to help.

* * *

[Translation]

POVERTY

Mr. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while our economy is vigorous, a number of people are living in poverty, aboriginal families and children in particular.

Can the Secretary of State for Children and Youth tell us what the government will be doing to help aboriginal children and youth?

[English]

Hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrew (Secretary of State (Children and Youth), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac on his election and his first question.

In the Speech from the Throne the government recognizes that too many aboriginal children live in poverty and too many aboriginal youth do not have the skills they need to enter the labour market. It also recognizes the fact that we invest \$25 million for youth at risk through the aboriginal human resources development strategy.

We realize we have to do more. We have to expand the programs that are available in aboriginal communities for early childhood development. We have to expand the aboriginal head start program. We have to continue to work to reduce the number of newborns with fetal alcohol syndrome. We will continue to work together to ensure that every child gets a good start in life.

* * *

GUN CONTROL

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday the *Globe and Mail's* front page headline read "Gun Law Creates 320,000 Canadian Outlaws".

Even if anyone still believes the justice department's numbers, this qualifies as the biggest act of civil disobedience in the nation's history. Hundreds of thousands of gun owners are now in a

catch-22. They cannot comply with the Firearms Act without admitting to the government that they are already guilty of owning firearms without a licence. Nor can they register their guns without one.

What will the Minister of Justice do with the 320,000 criminals that she created?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this gives me the opportunity to bring colleagues in the House up to date on the phenomenal success of our firearms registration program.

As the hon. member may not be aware, well over 2 million of the some 2.3 million Canadian gun owners have sought licences and have complied with this law.

• (1500)

We continue to work with those who at this point do not have their licences. Let me inform the House that the success of this program is phenomenal. Since December 1, 1998, over 65,000 potentially dangerous gun sales have—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, defiant firearms owners on and off reserves have repeatedly admitted publicly that they are now in unauthorized possession of firearms.

These people are flouting the Criminal Code of Canada. The code states that every person who knowingly is in possession of a firearm without a licence or registration certificate is guilty of an offence under section 92 and subject to a penalty of up to 10 years in jail.

Since the justice minister cannot answer the question, what will the solicitor general do? Will he admit that he cannot enforce these laws?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have made it absolutely plain that the criminal law of the country applies to all Canadians.

It would not be appropriate for me or the solicitor general to comment upon law enforcement activities of local police forces in local communities around the country, but I can assure the hon. member that local police forces will enforce the criminal law, as they do now and as they will continue to do, whether it is in relation to firearm offences or other offences.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, in response to questions yesterday and today the Minister of

The Address

Foreign Affairs referred to an exchange of notes between the foreign affairs office and the Russian Embassy. I would request that he table those notes.

The Speaker: The hon. member knows the rule that reference to documents is not one that requires the documents be tabled. Reading from documents may involve such a requirement, but reference does not.

The minister may wish to reply to the point of order. It is really another question. I think it is not a point of order. It is not well taken.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on the first Thursday of the new session to ask the government House leader about the business for the remainder of this week and the coming week.

I am especially intrigued by his response that the procedure and House affairs committee may be seized with the issue of parliamentary reform. Perhaps he could tell us some of his plans for that as well.

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me start by responding to the last point. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs was constituted by order of the House. I am sure we were all here when it occurred two days ago. Whether or not it wants to discuss any topic is its prerogative. In view of the tremendous independence exercised by that committee, I am sure it will discharge its responsibilities appropriately.

We shall continue today and tomorrow with the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. Tomorrow the government intends to introduce a number of government bills on which some progress had been made before the dissolution of parliament.

On Monday it is our intention to consider the second reading of the employment insurance amendments. I hope that bill will be completed at second reading before the end of the day. If such is the case, I would then intend to call the marine liability bill, Bill S-2, referred to the House by the other place earlier this day.

On Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday of next week we shall have the final three days of the address debate.

I would like to designate Thursday, February 8, as an allotted day.

• (1505)

[English]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS**SPEECH FROM THE THRONE**

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to have the opportunity to reply to the Speech from the Throne. It is also a privilege to have the opportunity to return to Ottawa once again to represent my constituents in Toronto—Danforth.

I will begin by thanking my constituents for the trust they have placed in me, in my team in Ottawa and in my team in the riding. I consider it a real privilege to be entrusted to bring the concerns and ideas of my community to the Chamber.

I have referred to this room many times before as the nation's boardroom. If we work constructively together in this room I believe we have nothing to worry about in terms of achieving a quality of life for Canada that will continue to rank us as the best country in the world in which to live.

In the last election my constituents brought a couple of issues to my attention. I feel I must bring them to the floor of the Chamber and tell my colleagues on both sides of the House that they will be an important preoccupation for me.

The first is affordable housing. Not a day passed during the last election campaign when my constituents did not urge me to spend time and energy to call attention to the fact that in the province of Ontario, and more specifically in the city of Toronto, there has not been a single affordable housing start in the last 10 years.

Regrettably in 1985 we devolved housing to the provinces. Ontario has had a very hard time meeting the needs of families who in many cases do not have access to affordable housing. In a city as rich as Toronto over 3,000 people live in motel rooms. It is unbelievable in a country as rich as Canada, in a city as economically vibrant as Toronto, that so many families live in motel rooms.

On November 1, during the election campaign, the Prime Minister announced that anywhere between 60,000 and 80,000 affordable housing units would be built in Canada over the next five years.

The Address

On behalf of my constituents I will bring all my energy and focus to bear in ensuring that the ministers responsible for that government commitment, not only during the election, not only in the red book, but in the Speech from the Throne, will implement it as soon as possible.

• (1510)

There are a number of issues we have to face as a nation over the next while. As members of parliament we have to blend our time with the needs and desires of our constituents. We also have a responsibility to work on emerging issues that require preplanning. We should listen in committee to expert witnesses from our own country and around the world. We have to plan, lay out a design for the future.

One issue has emerged and another is about to emerge in a serious way. The first is food security. I believe parliamentarians have a responsibility to put the issue of food security on the front burner of the legislative agenda over the next year or two.

The food security issue was tabled in the throne speech and has been touched on by the Prime Minister. He has said quite categorically that it will be on the agenda in the next 72 hours or so during his meeting with President Bush. He is the first G7 leader to meet with the new president.

It is important not only for Canadians to recognize this but that we as the House of Commons reflect and create an environment where food security becomes the central issue of parliament.

It is not only an issue that concern rural members. Farmers from every region of the country have been visiting members of parliament. My seat mate, the member for Egmont from Prince Edward Island, is meeting with a group of potato farmers. How many Canadians realize that potatoes from Prince Edward Island do not have access to the United States market? It is hard to imagine such a state could exist today.

When we speak in the House we are not only speaking to each other. We are also speaking to our constituents. I would say humbly that many urban constituents do not fully appreciate or understand the challenges and difficulties that family farmers in Canada are going through today.

As an urban member of parliament responding to the Speech from the Throne, I state clearly and with no hesitation that one of the priority issues I will be speaking about in parliament in the next year and a half will be a commitment to food security. I hope to work with members on both sides of the House to ensure this issue becomes something that we as a parliament moves forward in a meaningful, constructive way for the benefit of all Canadians, both rural and urban.

There is another issue that I will personally be spending a lot of time on in parliament. I spoke about it in my first speech 12 years ago when I was first elected. We were debating in a very forceful

way the free trade agreement which had seized every member of the House.

• (1515)

At that time I was in opposition. I had just completed my campaign. One of the reasons why I believe I was elected in that campaign, separate and apart from the fantastic leadership of the Right Hon. John Turner who was then leader of the party and did a magnificent job on the free trade debate, was that I sent out signals of alarm to my constituents that the whole issue of water was going to be something that we as Canadians and we as legislators must get our heads around.

In that very first speech, I asked the prime minister of the day, the Right Hon. Brian Mulroney, if he would consider asking President Reagan for a one page protocol letter that we could attach to the free trade agreement, wherein President Reagan would state that water was in no way, shape or form part of the free trade agreement. Needless to say, I did not get that protocol letter. However, over the last 12 years I have continued to be concerned and obsessed with this whole issue of water.

It is very important for us to realize that the first free trade negotiator for the United States of America was a gentleman by the name of Clayton Yeutter. Clayton Yeutter completed his doctoral thesis on North American water management at the University of Nebraska in 1961. He also, as a young assistant in congress, worked for Congressman Jim Wright, whose sole preoccupation was water and in fact wrote the book, *The Coming Water Famine*.

I am absolutely convinced that water is going to be a central issue in our relationship with the United States of America in the near future. I believe that we, as a parliament, in committee, in the House, must begin a very serious, focused campaign, a plan and a study of exactly where we as a nation stand on control of our fresh water in this country. We must look at the relationship of water in regard to the provinces, the municipalities and on an international basis.

I am happy to see that the Speech from the Throne states on page 13 that:

It is Canada's responsibility, as steward of one of the world's largest supplies of fresh water, to protect this critical resource. Safeguarding our water is a shared task among governments, industry and individual Canadians. The Government of Canada will fulfil its direct responsibilities for water, including the safety of water supplies on reserves and federal lands.

I was so delighted to see that last portion, wherein the safety of water supplies on reserves and federal lands is addressed. As we know, under the Indian Act the minister has a special constitutional prerogative to make sure that quality of water and standards of water on reserves are ultimately under the authority of the Government of Canada, this Chamber.

I believe that if we act soon on the particular authority that the minister and the House have, then we can set a bar for quality of fresh water that could affect every province and every municipality. I believe it is the duty of the House to make sure that we act on this file immediately.

• (1520)

I realize there are many other issues that have been dealt with in the Speech from the Throne, one in terms of the child poverty challenge that we as a House of Commons have to face.

There are also issues related to safety in our community and issues related to making sure that the anti-gang laws are reinforced. As one can imagine, in downtown Toronto this is a critical piece of legislation. It is not an issue just in the province of Quebec. Now that we have a merger of the Hell's Angels forces, it is very important that we seize the legislation and make sure that there are proper resources with which to enforce the legislation.

I highlight the fact that the legislation would give the customs and revenue department special authority. I have sought counsel on this matter from Mr. Yves Lavigne, who has spent most of his life working with the issue of the Hell's Angels. He is the author of *Hell's Angels at War* and has given me the direct advice that the best way to deal with these gangs is to make sure that the customs and revenue department has the proper resources with which to do its job.

That pretty well sums up my focus, but I want to repeat to my colleagues that I have always considered it a privilege to work with everyone in the House.

I say to my constituents that the issues of affordable housing, food security and making sure of Canada's trust in dealing with the precious resource of water will be my central focuses in the next year and a half.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there has been consultation among House leaders and, in the continued spirit of parliamentary reform, I think you would find consent for the following motion to be adopted without debate and unanimously. I move:

That Standing Order 104(2) be amended to read as follows:

The Address

(2) The standing committees which shall consist of the number of members stipulated below, and for which the lists of members are to be prepared, except as provided in section (1) of this Standing Order, shall be on:

- (a) Aboriginal Affairs, Northern Development and Natural Resources (sixteen Members);
- (b) Agriculture and Agri-Food (sixteen Members);
- (c) Canadian Heritage (sixteen Members);
- (d) Citizenship and Immigration (sixteen Members);
- (e) Environment and Sustainable Development (sixteen Members);
- (f) Finance (eighteen Members);
- (g) Fisheries and Oceans (sixteen Members);
- (h) Foreign Affairs and International Trade (eighteen Members);
- (i) Health (sixteen Members);
- (j) Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (eighteen Members);
- (k) Industry (sixteen Members);
- (l) Justice and Human Rights (eighteen Members);
- (m) National Defence and Veterans Affairs (sixteen Members);
- (n) Procedure and House Affairs (sixteen Members);
- (o) Public Accounts (seventeen Members);
- (p) Transport and Government Operations (sixteen Members).

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, and of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Madam Speaker, I offer you my best wishes for success in your duties in the Chair. We are all, of course, aware of your attachment to this House. My dealings with you have always been excellent, and I am sure that you will have the trust of your colleagues.

The Address

I also wish to congratulate the new members, those beginning their first term of office. Obviously, the member who just spoke does not fall into this category, this being his fourth or fifth term, if I am not mistaken. I congratulate him as well.

I have two questions for him. I agree with what he said about organized crime. This is a major problem for large cities and we both represent large city ridings.

I am a member from the east end of Montreal and he is a member from Toronto; we both know that a certain number of conditions must be in place for organized crime to operate. Naturally, it requires communities with wealth, and communities with bureaucracies, especially now that there are charter rights, as well as communities with rapid means of communication.

Proceeds from organized crime are estimated at over \$200 million. Given the state of organized crime, would the hon. member agree that we as parliamentarians should consider the possibility of using the notwithstanding clause to outlaw members of biker gangs?

The RCMP and the Criminal Intelligence Service Canada have estimated that there were 38 biker gangs in Canada, and I am not sure that we can outlaw them under existing legislation. So I ask him: Would he agree to join us in giving some thought to the possibility of using the notwithstanding clause to outlaw such groups?

[English]

Mr. Dennis Mills: Madam Speaker, I suggest to the hon. member that it is categorically no on the notwithstanding clause. However, as I mentioned, I think we need to make sure that the customs and revenue unit, which is an instrument of the government, is given the proper resources and tools. That is how we will shut these people down in no time flat.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to sit in the House and listen to the speeches summarizing the views of members about the throne speech. I most enjoy the speeches of my hon. colleague from Toronto—Danforth because he usually speaks so passionately about issues. I notice he did so again today, especially on the water issue.

However, I remember a time when I worked quite closely with my hon. colleague. He spoke very passionately at that time about the importance of this Chamber and the importance of parliamentary reform, especially because he had written such documents as “A Single Tax”. Even before the official opposition adopted that sort of policy as its own he was the author of that document. As well, he talked about changes to immigration along the lines of some things that I have suggested in the House.

Is my hon. colleague still committed to those issues as passionately as he was in those days when he was still a rookie in the

House? Is he still committed to parliamentary reform? Would he actually push for free votes in the House of Commons, an issue that was neglected in the Speech from the Throne?

Mr. Dennis Mills: Madam Speaker, I feel like I am being presented with a gift when I get such a lob ball question.

Is there anyone in the House who would doubt my commitment to parliamentary reform? I actually called one of the journalists from *The Hill Times* last night and congratulated him, reminding him that six months ago we put forth a pretty forceful article on the whole notion that the House of Commons had essentially degenerated to a point where we were nothing more than voting machines. I think the House leader was referring to my comments today in his question.

• (1530)

What we have today is a Prime Minister who has become seized with this issue. It is critical because it involves every member of the House. In the first press conference after the Prime Minister was re-elected, he was asked about the issue of parliamentary reform. His answer was, and I call it the Chrétien challenge—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I am sorry but the member's time has expired.

Mr. Dennis Mills: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think that this issue is so critical that I would like the concurrence of the House for one more minute.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Dennis Mills: Madam Speaker, my passion toward this issue has not diminished. At that press conference the Prime Minister actually bragged about his experience as a young backbencher. He said that when he was a young MP, if a person showed creativity with constructive ideas and could garner support in the House, then he would be there. I am not going to let him forget it.

In the Speech from the Throne yesterday, he actually cited the member for Mississauga South on fetal alcohol syndrome. That is something that rarely happens. We should take his lead and give it a whirl.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Madam Speaker, just briefly I want to confer to you our congratulations for assuming the chair. You bring a great dignity to the House. I have worked with you on committees and I know that you will fulfil your role more than adequately.

I know that the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth, has spoken very passionately on this issue too—

The Address

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I am sorry, but I would like to remind the hon. member that time has elapsed for questions and comments. If he would like to continue the debate perhaps he could go behind the curtains.

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Madam Speaker, I hope the member from the Toronto area remains in his seat so we can continue the debate. We came into the House together in 1988 and share a lot of institutional memory.

Before I get into my remarks, Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate you on your appointment to the chair. You are a great addition to the House and we welcome your presence.

I want to thank my constituents of New Brunswick Southwest as well for allowing me to represent them in the House of Commons. It is an honour and a privilege to do so. Like all of us, our commitment is to do our very best on the floor of the House. Hopefully I can do that today.

I thank my family, particularly my wife. As all members know, this business is tougher on families than it is on the members. There is no question that without them we could not be here. I want to thank my wife and my family for the sacrifices they have made.

In terms of throne speeches, there is nothing new in this one. Regardless of who forms the government, it is usually big on platitudes. The reality is we will have to see how committed the government is to carrying out some of what it has mentioned in the throne speech.

One of the things I want to focus on is the lack of consistency between red book one and two, and maybe to be determined red book three, in terms of what was promised and what was delivered. There was a wide gap there. Hopefully that gap will be closed in this next parliament with some co-operation from the government and members on this side of the House.

• (1535)

Let me remind the House that the election was called somewhat early. In fact, in a seven year period we had three elections. There was just a little over three and a half years between the 1997 election and the election last fall. I do not think there is any question that the Prime Minister was very calculating in terms of when that election was called. Giving him credit, he was smart enough to realize that the time was right and if he called an election when he did, he would most likely win it. In politics that is important. Winning is what it is all about in forming a government. Obviously, the Prime Minister's call was the right one in terms of winning office.

As our leader mentioned last night in his remarks to the Speech from the Throne, it is as much our fault as the government's fault. The government, to a degree without being too negative, did win the election by default. In a sense, there was not a strong enough alternative on this side of the House on which Canadians were comfortable enough to put their votes.

Luckily, some of us came over here and were elected to the House, hopefully to hold the government's feet to the fire in terms of what it said it will do and what we hope it will do. Sadly, Canadians could not see enough strength in one particular party to allow it to form the government. I hate to use this word because it sounds a little negative, but we are stuck with what we have. It is our job to try to make it a little bit better.

Let us go through some of the important issues that have been left simmering on the back burner by the government.

I was just reminded by the member from Nova Scotia, Madam Speaker, that I am splitting my time. I am sure I am going to get the big hook from the gentleman behind if I do not mention that. I think he is concerned because I am starting to ramble.

A number of issues were left over from the past election and I want to remind us of some of those. The immigration bill went through the process three times. In three elections an immigration bill was promised but nothing happened. It died on the order paper.

The species at risk legislation again died on the order paper and nothing happened. That was introduced three times but was never passed by the House.

The same thing occurred with the youth justice bill. It was a hotly debated issue in the last parliament and in the 1997 election, but again nothing happened. We are waiting for that legislation to come back. The financial services act died on the order paper. They are all very important.

There is the overhaul of the Employment Insurance Act. It died on the order paper just a few hours or days before the election was called. It was really important for those people who represented parts of the country that are not as blessed with a strong economy. We would like to see that introduced. I am told that it is going to be tabled in the House on Friday and we will be debating that very quickly. I hope the government is willing to listen and learn from its mistakes in how it handles people who are not as fortunate as we are in terms of employment opportunities and training. We are looking forward to that.

The government also, as was mentioned by the member from Winnipeg today, mishandled the rapid cost of home heating fuel and the rebate program that it introduced. It is doing it through the GST tax credit system. Obviously there are problems with that, Madam Speaker, because you or I could in fact receive the tax credit, but the ones who are actually paying the fuel bill cannot. It has created a real problem. It is neighbour against neighbour, family member against family member as to who is getting the credit and who is not. I do not think it was well thought out. It was well intentioned but it was brought in hastily without a lot of thought and without a lot of debate. It is one of those issues that could have come to the floor of the House of Commons and maybe some of the hitches and glitches could have been sorted out.

The Address

Again, we will be facing the native fishing issue in Atlantic Canada, which was a huge issue. In the last couple of years there has been no leadership on the part of the fisheries minister. Hopefully the minister responsible for the native issues in Canada along with the fisheries minister can do something to resolve that issue.

• (1540)

The old gun registration issue is an example of the government pitting rural Canada against urban Canada. It is another issue that will rear its ugly head in the House.

This morning I spoke to a member from Prince Edward Island, which is going through a crisis in what we call the potato war. It is an issue that has been devastating to the potato farmers in Prince Edward Island. It is reminiscent of the potato virus of the 1990s that affected New Brunswick. We are learning that no matter when a community gets into trouble or a commodity resurrects its ugly head in the country, we are all affected. None of us take any joy in that.

Although I represent a good part of the potato belt in New Brunswick, there will be negative affects on us because of that. It is simply because of some very strong heavy-handed practices by the United States in an attempt to keep our product out. It will come up with any issue at any time if it fits its needs. It does not want to play by rules set down by international trade or in trade agreements. When it is in its best interest to put the wood to us it will sometimes do it.

That leads me into what might be happening in regard to the United States. There is no question that its economy is in difficulty. That is going to spill over into Canada. It already has. How bad will it get and how will the government respond? Hopefully it will and some of the debates on what we can do to cushion the blow or make it better for Canadians will come to the floor of the House of Commons.

Our leader spoke last night of the spirit of co-operation for the reform of parliament. It should not always be adversarial in terms of what we can do as individual members of parliament to work together to solve problems.

Mr. John Harvard (Charleswood St. James—Assiniboia, Lib.): Madam Speaker, congratulations to you on your appointment to the chair. I am absolutely confident that you will do a great job.

I have a comment that arises from the hon. member's remarks relating to the federal government's fuel rebate program. First, the government should be applauded for moving quickly to come

forward with a program that will cost \$1.4 billion. There will be rebates going to over eight million Canadians.

However, there is no doubt that there have been complaints coming in. Perhaps the program is not as perfect as it could be. One of the problems we hear has to do with people who were not eligible for the GST rebate in the last tax year but certain things have happened since. Some people are telling me that they have gone through a separation, or lost their job or have a reduced income for some reason. However, at this point they are not eligible for the GST rebate, therefore they do not get the fuel rebate. That is a problem.

I spoke to the finance minister and he is sensitive to this. I know the government is looking at the issue. Perhaps there is a way to make the program better. There is pain out there and I just hope the government can fine tune the fuel rebate program.

• (1545)

Mr. Greg Thompson: Madam Speaker, I will take the member's comments in the generosity in which they were given. I agree that the rebate was good. What I am saying is that it could probably have been fine tuned. However, we do not hesitate to congratulate the government on what it is doing. It is unfortunate that those types of difficulties are out there.

I wanted to make a point with regard to disparity in the country and the inability of some Canadians to pay their heating bills because of unemployment, the rising cost of fuel or living on fixed income. It is interesting that the member for Fredericton, my neighbouring community, is talking about the federal government making a promise two years ago to lift the cap on equalization payments.

He said in yesterday's Saint John *Telegraph Journal* that the promise to lift equalization payments came after the ceiling on the Canada health and social transfer was removed but argued that generally benefits the wealthier provinces with its per capita formula for distributing federal funds.

He said he had no trouble telling us that Atlantic MPs will be working on the interests of Atlantic Canadians. That means acting on a political commitment that was made with the specific intention of bringing more equity to the country. He said there were provinces in one part of Canada struggling to maintain health services and provinces in other parts of the country that were rebating its citizens with their good fortune.

I do not have to identify those provinces. We all know them. That is the disparity that I am talking about within Canada. The federal government needs to recognize that those provinces need help to maintain the services we have come to expect as Canadians.

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What it boils down to is a bigger, broader sense of a generous Canada. We are hoping that the finance minister will act on that. I fully support the member for Fredericton in his comments and his commitment to see that promise fulfilled. We are hoping that the finance minister will do that.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment to the chair. It is a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. While I am on my feet I would like to take a moment to thank the citizens and constituents of the riding of South Shore for putting their trust in me to represent them in the Parliament of Canada.

The throne speech provides an excellent opportunity for the government of the day to set out its vision for Canada and the steps it will take to achieve its objectives. We did not hear much from the government. It does not live up to the ideal of a government that has a vision for the 21st century. We heard the same story in its last throne speech. There were no changes, no bold new ideas or initiatives.

In his reply yesterday, the hon. member for Calgary Centre observed that the Speech from the Throne had little information or depth, denoting the government's lack of plans for the country. There was little discussion of issues of importance such as the need for parliamentary reform or financial direction in the form of a budget. Instead there were no new ideas put forth, simply regurgitation of previous issues that were not given the priority they deserved, or they would have been passed in the previous parliament.

The member for Calgary Centre was clear about the need for a reform of parliament and the need for the issue to be discussed and debated on the floor of the House. If there has ever been a time when we needed parliamentary reform, it is obviously now.

I am wearing a copper pin made from the copper roofing that came off the roofs of the parliament buildings when they were replaced.

• (1550)

As every person in the House realizes, the Parliament Buildings burnt down in 1916 and were rebuilt in 1922. The copper was actually replaced in the roof because in one instance the library was leaking and was contaminating some of the books in the basement. What the government chose to do at that time was to replace the roof and keep up the infrastructure of the building.

Sadly, that has been the caretaker attitude of the government. It is willing to fix the roof to keep it from leaking, and it is willing to keep up the basic maintenance of infrastructure and the physical structure but it is not willing to do anything about the nuts and bolts

of parliament. It is also not willing to do anything about the job that we are elected to do here, which is to govern the country and bring about responsible and reasonable reform when it is required.

There have been changes and chances to modernize the system. The government recognized that by fixing the roof. However, why is the government waiting before it makes similar changes to replace, restore and change outdated parliamentary procedures? It is not rocket science.

There are issues that should have been discussed and debated in the throne speech. I would like to raise an issue that the member for Toronto—Danforth raised regarding food security. He spoke as an urban member and I certainly appreciate that. However, I would like to return a question to the member as a rural member of parliament and as a member of parliament who has some knowledge and some understanding of what goes on in rural Canada and the need for the government, and hopefully the member for Toronto—Danforth, to pursue initiatives that can help rural Canadians live on a par with urban Canadians.

The member spoke specifically about the need for safe food and safe water. I do not think there is any member of parliament who would disagree with that. I wonder if the urban member of parliament for Toronto—Danforth really understands what he is talking about.

If we are going to have safe food and safe water then the government has to stop downloading the costs on to the people who produce safe food and who we quite often depend upon to enforce regulations and put safeguards in place to protect our water supplies. I am talking about the farmers.

For years this government has continued to download the costs of running the Canada Food Inspection Agency on to the people who produce the food instead of downloading those costs on to the people who consume the food. If we want safe food and safe water then all Canadians have to pay for it, not just the farmers who grow the food. This is a much larger issue than that.

The hon. member went on to talk about the fiasco and the lack of action that the government has taken on the potato wart in P.E.I., which my hon. colleague from New Brunswick spoke about earlier. We have neighbours to the south who for years have used phytosanitary trade restrictions as a non-tariff trade barrier. The government should not be surprised by that. It has been several weeks since the potato wart was discovered in P.E.I. and there has been no plan of action from the government of the day.

It is totally unacceptable that seven or eight weeks after potato wart was found in P.E.I. that there is no plan in place. There is a vague promise that the government is going to do something. The member for Malpeque was quoted in the paper as saying that the

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government was going to do something. However, that is not good enough. That is absolutely intolerable.

There is nothing in the throne speech about fisheries. The same government was willing to give \$500 million to integrate first nations into the fishery and has done nothing to ensure that integration takes place. The government is willing to spend \$500 million on an issue and not follow it up. It is never going to be looked at again. The book will never be opened. It will be set down on a desk and the page will never be turned again.

• (1555)

We cannot continue to govern the country in such a manner. We need a long term commitment to our fisheries, to fisheries training and to stock replenishment.

There is absolutely nothing on the government's agenda except that it gave a bit of money, I believe it was \$12 million, to the wild salmon in the inner Bay of Fundy. That is not good enough. We have recently realized through new DNA testing that the inner Bay of Fundy salmon stocks are one of three distinct salmon species in the world. We have the B.C. stock; the North Atlantic stock, which is most of Canada and Europe; and the inner Bay of Fundy stock, a separate species of salmon.

Gratitude and platitude from the government are not enough to save this endangered species. It is not enough to save the fisheries or to help agriculture or to begin to understand the diverse issues affecting ordinary Canadians.

I will return for a moment to some very important resource sector issues. The Americans continually and at every opportunity use the phytosanitary certificate as a non-tariff trade barrier. It is something we are used to. Those of us in the agriculture sector and in the forestry sector are used to that. We expect it, plan for it and lobby against it, but the government has turned a deaf ear to our cry.

Members of the government do not seem to understand the importance of our agriculture sector. They certainly have no comprehension whatsoever of the importance of our forestry sector.

Last week, the premier of Yukon, Pat Duncan, was in Ottawa lobbying the federal government on a serious issue that is arising in Alaska. It looks as if the new president in the U.S. and his new interior secretary are willing to open up the national Arctic wildlife refuge in Alaska to oil drilling.

If the U.S. builds a pipeline to that refuge, it will cut off the migration of the porcupine caribou herd which migrates from Alaska to Canada and from Canada to Alaska. The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth said he was willing to discuss important issues of the day with the Prime Minister. That is an issue he should be discussing with the Prime Minister, to get it on the agenda when the Prime Minister meets with the American president next week.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Madam Speaker, the hon. member just told us that the government had patched up leaks and that it was better at patching up leaks than at repairing structures.

I would like to know if he agrees with me that not only does the government not repair structures, it tries to break them.

One simply has to look at the inaugural speech to see how, rather than dealing with issues that come under its own jurisdiction, this government is constantly trying to break up existing structures and to create trouble by infringing on provincial jurisdictions, including those of Quebec.

I would like to know if the hon. member agrees with me.

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Madam Speaker, I thank the new member of parliament for his question and certainly welcome him to the House. I appreciate the question, although I am not the expert on all issues that occur between the federal government and the provinces.

There are many issues for which we have striven as a party and have raised in this place. The government can work in conjunction with the provinces, whether it be the province of Quebec, Nova Scotia or Alberta. The government tends not to do that. It tends to go off on its own tangents, to have its own agenda and to satisfy its own agenda of simply getting re-elected. It is not anything about what is good for Canada or the provinces.

• (1600)

If the government really wanted to do something for the province of Quebec or the provinces of western Canada or eastern Canada, all it would have to do is to work in a concentrated effort to strike down interprovincial trade barriers which affect business and opportunities in Quebec and eastern Canada.

I would personally like to see as a member of parliament the government taking a more proactive, responsible and reasonable attitude toward all the provinces and working in conjunction with them for the betterment of all.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, the previous speaker outlined a whole host of shortcomings in the Speech from the Throne. Would he agree with me that one of the most horrendous oversights in the Speech from the Throne is the complete omission or the lack of any comment whatsoever on one of the most pressing issues facing Canadians: the spiralling cost of home heating fuel, gasoline, diesel fuel and the completely unregulated way the free market seems to be gouging Canadian consumers in this regard?

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We have had phone calls from northern Manitoba where people are now paying more to heat their homes than they pay for their mortgage, at \$900 and \$1,000 a month. In the province of Alberta where they completely deregulated natural gas supply, the price of natural gas is going up 125%.

There has been absolutely no comment from the federal government on how it might intervene to bring some sense of order to the whole distribution and production of this precious natural resource. Would the hon. member like to comment on that glaring oversight in the Speech from the Throne?

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Madam Speaker, without question the increasing cost in energy is spiralling out of control. Again we see a government that is not willing to deal with the issue.

The hon. member mentioned specifically home heating fuel. I do not know of a single issue, beyond a year ago when the federal government was somehow thinking it would put money into professional hockey, where I received as many phone calls on a single government initiative. We are looking at a government initiative that I think was meant to help Canadians but like most projects the government supports, it was not thought through.

The government said it would give people who receive the GST rebate a \$125 fuel rebate. It did not take into consideration students in university who do not pay for fuel. It did not take into consideration widows who live alone, have a home to heat and get \$125 and a couple living next door who gets \$250.

It is just patently unfair. It did not take into consideration that the cost of natural gas in Manitoba has gone up by slightly more than one-third. It did not take into consideration the advice we gave the government prior to the election on the price of gas.

Mr. Murray Calder (Dufferin—Peel—Wellington—Grey, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Winnipeg South Centre. I congratulate you on your appointment to the chair. It will be a very interesting experience for you. I also congratulate the new Speaker on his election.

I will focus in on one particular part of the Speech from the Throne, the second paragraph on page 5. I want to take a look at one part of the sentence which states that the Government of Canada will help Canada's agricultural sector move beyond crisis management.

I was very happy to hear that, because that is the tool box. I have been watching with interest the Prime Minister. I heard about some of the tools yesterday and the fact that he will be aggressively going after the new President of the United States to get subsidies reduced.

• (1605)

Before I go into the harm of subsidies on the family farm across Canada, I would like people to understand and my urban colleagues to listen because I believe we are talking about the issue of food sovereignty. We have other sovereignty issues within Canada, but the most important one that we have to look at is food sovereignty.

The average age of a farmer in Canada today is 57. Members of the next generation coming up behind take a look at how hard it is to make a living on a farm today and ask why the heck they would want to do that. They are taking a look at other occupations and other vocations that they will educate themselves for to make a living.

My first question would be who will replace us. I am a farmer and I am 50. I am just below the average, but who will replace us? Who will grow the food for the next generation?

On February 6, average Canadians will have made enough money to pay their grocery bill for the year. Thirty-seven days into the year and average Canadians have made enough money to pay their grocery bill.

What is the farmer's component of that when he has paid for everything that he has done? On January 9, nine days into the year, and he has been paid for all his work.

Mr. Ken Epp: That is a shame.

Mr. Murray Calder: I hear the comment from the other side. I agree it is a shame. Farmers today work hard and deserve a fair return for their product. The biggest problem that I see right now within the farming sector is that farmers have become price takers. They are told what they will get for their product, whether it is fair or not, and that is it.

The international subsidy war we are into right now is about as bad as what it was in 1984. It has to be rectified or we will lose a base industry called agriculture. The agri-food industry is second only to our automotive industry.

My colleagues and I are working hard to make sure that does not happen. There is a clock ticking right now and it is called spring planting. We have 60 to 90 days. At that point in time a challenge will face the government, members of the House and those on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Standing Committee on Finance because there will have to be money for this. How do we help farmers get the seeds in the ground when they have to be planted? That is the question.

I am a member of parliament from Ontario and I am still an active farmer. Each year I hold an agriculture round table at the OAC in Guelph. It was held on January 17 of this year, at which point in time we discussed a number of initiatives. We discussed

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research and development in Ontario and Canada. Twenty-four commodity groups representing the agricultural industry in Ontario and six members of parliament were sitting on a panel listening to their problems and discussing the solutions. We affectionately call the exercise a brick and a bouquet meeting.

We do not have the press there. It is a kitchen table meeting with farmers sitting around the table, talking about agriculture and the problems facing it today. Yes, we come up with solutions to different problems. We discuss biotechnology, which is a major issue for our industry right now. A number of ideas and concerns came forward in that regard.

• (1610)

We discussed the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. We discussed the environment and the fact that farmers in Ontario think that the environmental farm plan is an excellent program that was put forward by CARD and should be continued instead of being cancelled on March 31, 2001.

If people have read the paper as to the environment issues facing agriculture, Walkerton for instance, the environmental farm plan sets a good basis for the agricultural industry to work from, to work on issues like nutrient management.

We also discussed at great length the farm income safety nets and agricultural trade issues. We looked at the fact that right now the federal government, through the Canada farm income program, is putting in \$3.3 billion over the next three years. The provinces are also stepping up to the plate to the tune of \$2.2 billion, making a total program expenditure over the next three years of \$5.5 billion.

We discussed programs like NISA, crop insurance, fall cash advances and province specific companion programs like market revenue. We discussed the issue that Ontario producers will receive 3.3 billion in federal support for core safety net programs, which is an increase of 30% over the previous allotment.

We also discussed the issue of the WTO negotiations. We have a lot of concerns about subsidies because that is the biggest problem for the commodity prices right now. It is causing overproduction and downward pressure on commodity prices.

One of the issues that came out loud and clear last year during the 11 meetings held across Ontario with the grain and oilseed producers was the fact that after the cost of putting their seed in the ground, the escalating costs of diesel fuel, the cost of their time and the depreciation on equipment, there was nothing left over. They in fact said that they were in the red. They said that they could only keep that up for a certain amount of time before the bank would be at the front gate and it would be 1984 all over again.

As soon as the committees are up and running, those are the issues that we as a government have to look at immediately. I see it as a two pronged point. I go back to crisis management. We have a crisis that will happen this spring and, quite frankly, we need solution within the next 60 days to answer that crisis. We have to go a step past that to make sure that we have long term programs in place so we do not keep going from crisis to crisis within the agricultural sector.

The general consensus that came from the meeting in Guelph, after we had looked at all the programs that are in place, was that we do not need new programs. What we need are the programs, which are in place right now, to respond more quickly, to require less paperwork and to have more money incorporated in them in order to address the problems that the growers are facing right now. If that is done within the next 60 days or within this term, I believe we will be able to deal with and move beyond the crisis management in agriculture.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I too add my congratulations for your ascendancy to the big chair. I know that you will do a great job there.

I want to say to the hon. member who just spoke that it was a delight to hear from a member of parliament on the government side who actually has firsthand experience on the farm. I do not think that we as members of parliament should be restricted in giving our message to the government, depending on which party we are from, but it somehow gives added strength when a member from the government side can point out that there are some Liberals who actually understand the farm crisis.

• (1615)

In both the province and in my riding where I live there are many farmers who are in severe, immediate crisis. This is even more so in Saskatchewan and Manitoba than it is in Alberta. I have had quite a few discussions with these people.

Their long term solution is that they need to get enough income from the sale of their products so that their operating expenses can be met. That is the simple long term solution. However, there are farms that are going to be taken away immediately from families who have had them for 100 years in some cases.

As the member is probably aware, Alberta and Saskatchewan only became provinces in 1905. Some of those farms in my riding were occupied by members of the family even before Alberta became a province.

I talked to farmers who imminently are going to lose their farms to the banks. They are going to be out of business and out of the homes that they have occupied for many years.

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I would like to ask the member: Notwithstanding the fact that there is a political component to everything we say here, just from a straight, practical point of view, what can be done immediately in order to save the distress that those families are going through at this time?

Mr. Murray Calder: Madam Speaker, the member for Elk Island asked a very good question.

I have been on the standing committee on agriculture since I was first elected in 1993. I am very proud of the committee that I sit on because all parties work together. Partisan politics stay at the door when we go into that committee.

We are all farmers on the committee. We know agriculture inside and out. I believe that as soon as the committee is up and running we are going to put our voice to the minister as loudly and as immediately as we possibly can. This is a time clock that is ticking.

Whether we use a spring cash advance for instance is one thing. However, in my mind \$20,000 in interest free loan is not enough. However, it has to be more than that. That would be the first thing we could do to address this immediate problem of getting the seeds into the ground.

Obviously the next problem is going to be in the fall when the products are coming off the fields. We want to make sure there is something in place so farmers can break even and make some money. That is what we will be working toward.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, there is sort of a cruel joke going around the area that I live in. It is about the farmer who wins the 649 lottery and his friends ask him "What are you going to do with all that money?" He says "I am just going to keep farming until it is all gone".

As the member pointed out, farmers are farming at a loss of as much as \$80 per acre. Our caucus just met with a delegation of farmers who were on the Hill. They pointed out that 22,000 farmers left the farm last year alone in the three prairie provinces. That is an emergency.

The Minister of Industry dumbfounded most Canadians the other day when he tried to justify giving Bombardier billion dollar loans. He said it was an industry that we could not afford to lose.

My question is for the hon. member who represents that side of the House. Is the prairie agricultural industry not an industry that we cannot afford to lose, and just as important as the aerospace industry in Montreal?

• (1620)

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is indeed with enormous pride, great humility and some considerable nervousness that I rise to speak for the first time in the Chamber.

Let me offer you congratulations on assuming the role as a Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to see you sitting there.

I also want to offer my congratulations to my colleagues, the mover and the seconder of the Speech from the Throne. They set a high standard of eloquence and commitment to the class of 2001.

I most especially want to thank the women and men of Winnipeg South Centre for the profound trust they have shown in sending me here. I also want to thank the many hundreds of volunteers who in four and a half weeks worked thousands of hour to ensure that a Liberal voice would continue to speak for Winnipeg South Centre.

I would be remiss if I did not say that for me family comes first. I want to publicly acknowledge the unequivocal love and support of my three daughters, Jessica, Elissa and Sarah for their support and understanding in this election campaign and many of the tasks that I have undertaken.

I am here today because the Hon. Lloyd Axworthy has chosen to leave politics and follow another path. Many of us wonder what political and public life in Manitoba will be like without him. Involved in our politics for almost 30 years, Lloyd Axworthy served us with great distinction, with a real pride in the community that sent him to serve them in the nation's capital. In Winnipeg and in Manitoba his landmarks are everywhere. Those of us who have worked with him will be true to his legacy by keeping alive his vision of public service.

Winnipeg South Centre is as diverse an urban community as one can find in the country. It is a riding of many faces: great wealth and privilege coupled with great poverty, many young people and students and many who have long passed three score and ten. There are many communities of recent immigrants and many whose families have lived there for several generations. There are large numbers of single parents and many young families throughout. There is a large urban aboriginal community in this riding.

It is, indeed, a community I know well having represented a large portion of it as a member of the board of trustees of the Winnipeg school division for the last 14 years. Much in the Speech from the Throne spoke to the concerns, the issues, the activities and the initiatives of the residents of Winnipeg South Centre and I would like to focus on just a few.

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Members may be surprised to know that 25% of the children of Winnipeg South Centre live in poverty. Although child poverty exists throughout the community, there is a handful of places where it has reached epidemic levels. Winnipeg's inner city is unfortunately one of these places.

Furthermore, there are 50,000 people of aboriginal ancestry living in the city of Winnipeg, a large number of whom live in Winnipeg South Centre. In 1971 approximately 57% of Winnipeg's aboriginal households lived in poverty. In 1996 that number was 65%. Unfortunately it continues to grow.

The Speech from the Throne spoke directly to aboriginal people, from reducing the incidents of fetal alcohol syndrome, preventable diabetes and tuberculosis to meeting the basic needs of health, housing, work and education. It also spoke to strengthening their entrepreneurial spirit and business expertise.

My pledge based on my record to the people of Winnipeg South Centre was to ensure the safety and well-being of our children, to ensure them a solid future and to ensure that all children have the opportunity to be the best they can be. The Speech from the Throne has addressed this concern on many fronts. It refers to making sure that no child suffers from the debilitating effects of poverty.

The government has begun to tackle this ominous task by committing to increase the contribution to the groundbreaking national child benefit and by investing \$2 billion in the early childhood development agreement. We heard the Prime Minister commit yesterday to a major focus on an investment timetable that will allow us to make real progress for children.

• (1625)

It is also reassuring to know that the government will take steps to ensure that laws protect our children from those who would prey on their vulnerability through Internet luring.

I am proud to be part of a government that recognizes that the real engine of growth is the human mind. Continued learning and skills training is a challenge facing all areas of the country. The establishment of registered individual learning accounts will make it easier for adult learners to finance their learning. Workers will be able to learn while they earn.

It is also important to the residents of Winnipeg South Centre to know that the government is committed to give colleges, universities and research hospitals a greater role in feeding the networks and clusters that will connect the brightest researchers with dynamic entrepreneurship.

Very important, financial responsibility and growth is reflected in the Speech from the Throne. The people of Winnipeg South Centre are looking to their government to continue to make Canada one of the most attractive places to invest and to do business. They

look to our government to support innovation and to ensure that all Canadians benefit from technology.

I also know that many will applaud the increased commitment to both the CBC and the arts and heritage community.

Much is currently happening in Winnipeg South Centre. It is a vital, vibrant, dramatically diverse community where initiatives abound, be it the Little Red Spirit Head Start Program, the community justice program in West Broadway, the innovative health initiatives at the Riverview Health Centre, the Asper Jewish Community Centre or the Centro Caboto Centre.

At the risk of being parochial, I want to pay particular tribute to the community of the Winnipeg School Division. Not only does it provide quality education to young people, it has frequently, often without support from other jurisdictions of government, piloted or facilitated many programs that are finally now gaining recognition. These are primarily childhood interventions and assessments, culturally appropriate programs and curricula for aboriginal children, housing registries and family resource centres and policies and programs of inclusion.

It is indeed a remarkable institution often not acknowledged for the groundbreaking efforts on behalf of children and their families. It gives me great pleasure to do so here.

In closing, I want to say how proud I am, on behalf of my community, to be part of a government that believes in opportunity with a social conscience, inclusion for the strangers among us, justice and opportunity for our first nations and public generosity for those in need.

It is a government with an understanding of the importance of a strong foundation, a sound economy with incentives and opportunities and growth. It is a government that provides opportunity in a country where citizens will honour their responsibility to give something back to their communities. It is a government that recognizes that sound financial management is indeed a means to an end. It is a government that acknowledges that life is also lived in the spirit in our benevolence toward each other, in true respect for our differences and in the quality of our public service.

I am pleased and proud to be here on behalf of the citizens of Winnipeg South Centre.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to be the first to welcome the member for Winnipeg South Centre and to commend her on what was a very fine maiden speech. Many of the remarks I have no problem associating myself with. In fact, she almost sounded like an NDPer for a little bit there.

• (1630)

We actually share a border in that the riding of Winnipeg South Centre borders the riding of Winnipeg Centre. As such, we share a

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great number of issues and, frankly, a great number of social problems. The hon. member pointed out that an awful large percentage of children in her riding live below the poverty line. The figure for the riding of Winnipeg Centre is that 52% of all children live below the poverty line. It is a staggering statistic and a huge challenge for both of us.

I rise, though, to point out that the hon. member was a school trustee in the city of Winnipeg for many years. School division no. 1 has 92 buildings and schools within its boundaries. Surely one of the challenges the hon. member faced was how to heat and pay the operating costs of those schools.

Would she not agree that the government should play some role in regulating the skyrocketing costs of heating fuels, not only for homes but for institutions, for schools, hospitals, universities and all those other public institutions that are being crippled by their operating costs and debt loads?

Should the government not have said something in the Speech from the Throne about what to do in regard to the heating fuel crisis in this harsh northern climate?

Ms. Anita Neville: Madam Speaker, earlier today we heard the Minister of Finance speak to the issue of the rebates to low income residents for rising fuel costs. I am pleased that he is in a position to do that. It has come about through sound, wise fiscal management and I applaud his efforts.

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on your position as Chair. I am sure you will do a fine job.

As well, I congratulate the member for Winnipeg South Centre for her fine maiden speech.

The hon. member knows well that farmers in the prairies are hurting. In the last two years the number of farmers in Manitoba was reduced by up to 20%. If things do not change, we can probably anticipate another 16% of farmers leaving the land. Even the great city of Winnipeg relies on the agricultural economy, and I know that Ontario agriculture, which is about a \$95 billion industry, is second only to the auto industry.

I notice that in the throne speech the government mentions agriculture, whether it is through using the words farm, farmers or farming, only three times. In fact, the speech indicated that we need to look past crisis management and go on to value added innovation. I agree with that, but unfortunately we are in a time of crisis and we need to manage the crisis before we can move on. If we do not deal with the immediate crisis, there will not be many farmers left to save.

This country needs a food policy, as one of the members indicated earlier this afternoon. It also needs a national agricultural policy. What will the member for Winnipeg South Centre do now that she is part of government to ensure that the farmers of Manitoba stay in business and do not end up in the city of Winnipeg looking for work?

Ms. Anita Neville: Madam Speaker, I share the concerns the hon. member has about the farming community. I share the concerns for the farmers and I have concerns about the impact, as he well knows, on the city of Winnipeg.

I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister speak to it yesterday and to hear the comments in the throne speech on the issues related to the farming community, such as the commitment to work to provide a long term sustainable response to farming and not simply crisis management. I will be pleased to work as part of government and with the member, being a Manitoban, to ensure that the farmers of Manitoba have the opportunities that they and their families so deserve.

● (1635)

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I extend congratulations to you on your appointment. I look forward to working with you in this 37th parliament.

I will start my speech by thanking the constituents in my riding who supported me in the recent election and sent me back for a third term. I do appreciate their endorsement and I look forward to serving them in the years ahead.

Having just come through the election, today I would like to talk about democratic empowerment in particular and about changes that I think are missing from the throne speech and would do much to improve the way this place does business and much to improve the lot of all members of parliament, both on the government backbench and here on the opposition side.

Recently I was on a trip to London, England, where I witnessed firsthand some of the reforms that are taking place in the mother parliament. It actually has a modernization committee, that is, a committee dedicated to modernizing parliament, the House of Lords, the electoral system and the role of backbench MPs by giving them more say and so on.

It was interesting for me to stand in that place where there has been democracy of a sort for probably 1,000 years. There in the mother parliament, in the old tradition bound area of a Westminster style parliament, active steps are being taken to bring parliament and the electoral system into the 21st century. That aggressive, positive way of setting about its business is what is going to make it

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succeed, rather the attitude the Liberal government seems to employ, which is an ad hoc attitude of hoping it works today and maybe we can get away with doing the minimum possible. What a difference.

While I was there I did find a quote of Winston Churchill's about Canada. He said:

That long (Canadian) frontier from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans, guarded only by neighbourly respect and honourable obligations, is an example to every country and a pattern for the future of the world.

His speech was given at the Canada Club in London, where he honoured R.B. Bennett with those words.

What of that message to the world, not only on our relationships with our American neighbours but on democracy in general? What kind of message are we sending to the world? Although we have much to be proud of, there are some things that have gone awry in our democratic process, especially here in parliament.

Time and again we hear from both sides of the House, and from the public generally, about the fact that too much power is concentrated in the Prime Minister's Office, the fact that too much discipline is exercised by parties in the House, the fact that there is not enough freedom for members of parliament to represent their constituencies and the fact that there is too much control by the whips of the voting process, such that there is not enough freedom for people to represent their constituents and the ideals that brought them to this place to begin with.

The Prime Minister will argue that he allows free votes. I requested the Library of Parliament to do a research paper for me to find out how many free votes have been held on government legislation since he took office. It is a very short paper, because it says there have been no free votes on government legislation during his entire tenure. However, the Prime Minister has allowed free votes on private members' bills. In fact, I believe 19 actually passed. Unfortunately, 17 of the 19 just changed the names of riding boundaries. Those are the private members' bills. In other words, 2 out of all 400 bills that were debated in this place actually made it through the system and became law.

That is perhaps why we have quotes from Liberal backbenchers such as the one from the member from Broadview—Greenwood, who said that parliament does not work, that it is broken, that it is like a car motor that is working on two cylinders. Or there is the member for Sarnia—Lambton who, when talking about committees, said that the party whips come into the room and make it a complete sham. The member for Lac-Saint-Louis said that being in the backbench, they are typecast as if they are all stupid, that they are just supposed to be voting machines.

Others have noticed that this is happening. In a June 16 article in the Ottawa *Citizen*, David Law, a professor at the Royal Military

College, when speaking at a conference, warned about the decay of our democratic institutions in Canada. He said:

If Canada de-democratizes (then) internationally there is the danger that the democratization process will slip and slide, with disastrous repercussions for regional and global security.

● (1640)

He thinks that our democracy here has an impact around the world and I believe it does. He went on to say that one of the factors eroding democracy in Canada is a broken party system with demoralized backbenchers.

We need to see change. One of the things we did bring forward is a 12 point plan that I believe has been described as a 12 point plan for those addicted to too much political power. It is a plan to democratize the House of Commons. It would allow more free votes, again to mirror what goes on in our mother parliament over in England. It would allow the Speaker to intervene if he or she thinks closure or time allocation is brought in either too frequently or too soon in the debate.

Part of it is about more committee power, with more power for members in their committees. They would have independence and could get a lot of work done. It would also allow for a true ethics commissioner, who would report directly to parliament. Again that is something that the Prime Minister promised in the first red book and has yet to deliver. It would allow for a new standing committee to review not only privacy but access and the new ethics commissioner, who should be reporting to parliament itself.

All these things can be done. In fact, I was a little surprised at the response. I received a very good reaction to these proposals. Even some of our friends in the media liked them, which was nice to see. *The Globe and Mail* said they were sensible proposals and long overdue. *The National Post* said they are 12 worthy reforms. The *Vancouver Sun* said they are simple and doable. Even the *Calgary Herald* said they are progressive points that would do much to bring back democracy.

I have never claimed they were perfect, but they are an intentional effort to modernize parliament and make it more effective. It is not ad hoc. It is not "I hope it works better, maybe next week, and if we put in electronic voting", like the government says, "all our problems will be solved". No, it is not that attitude.

We need to make a conscious effort to set out to modernize this place and give backbench MPs on both sides of the House more responsibility and more of a chance to represent their constituents.

The government had a chance in the throne speech. It promised something would happen. Everybody got their hopes up. This is what we got: we are going to study electronic voting, and there will be more money for committee researchers.

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The Library of Parliament committee researchers in this place do a wonderful job. Everyone I have ever talked to in the House is amazed at the amount of work they do and at how much we depend on them. They do a great job. However, giving more money for committee research is not going to democratize the House. That is not going to change the House or set it on its ear or send a message to the world that changes are coming in Canada's parliamentary system.

It is a disappointment that the throne speech is so shallow and that so little is said about the need for democratic reform. In fact, the two little things that are mentioned, the electronic voting and the money for committee research, will do nothing to address the key concerns of members in this place.

I will be dividing my time with the whip of the official opposition, but in conclusion I would invite the Prime Minister to build a legacy for himself. A lot of people worry about what legacy they will leave. Sometimes budget problems come in or worldwide recessions come in and so on. There are the vagaries of the international marketplace. However, there is an opportunity here to build a legacy of a renewed and reinvigorated Parliament of Canada.

I invite the Prime Minister to let us set out to make the House work better. Let us consciously do it. Let us do what New Zealand did. It modernized not only parliament but the electoral system. Let us do like Australia did, which not only set out to modernize parliament, which it did, but also to modernize its senate. Let us set out like the United Kingdom did and say "Let us talk not only about how we can make this place work better but also about a new electoral system". The United Kingdom has done it. Even though there is a majority government, it has commissioned an electoral commission to put together proposals to make the electoral system work better for all people in England.

I invite the Prime Minister to build a legacy, and not just on the steady as you go stuff. I invite the Prime Minister to step out a little. It will not hurt. It is surprising. I invite the Prime Minister to take the first steps and to first of all just say to himself that there is a problem. Let us strike a committee. Let us invite all members from all parties to be part of it.

• (1645)

Let us set out with a goal to modernize the House, to make it better for backbench MPs on both sides of the House. Let the legacy be that we built a better parliament with more productive members who are able to represent their constituents better and are able to enhance people's opinion of this place in the years to come.

What a legacy and what an opportunity for the Prime Minister to leave his stamp on the House for the coming century. I invite him to do it. I look forward to his input on that.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on assuming a very important role in making sure that the tenor of the House continues to be constructive.

I say to the opposition House leader that I have absolutely no problem with the member quoting my article from *The Hill Times* of some six months ago that we as members of parliament should be seized with the issue of parliamentary reform. Most members on the government side would appreciate the fact that opposition members acknowledge that within government, members can debate freely, openly and constructively.

I say to the House leader, who has spent a lot of time in England with our government House leader discussing things with him, that it is not constructive for the member not to acknowledge the fact that when the Prime Minister in his first press conference after the election was asked about the issue by the media, he issued what I term lately the Chrétien challenge. If members really want to show the leadership and the insight to reform the House then he would be there in a second.

He cited examples of his own backbench experience when he was an MP. I think he even bragged about how he changed Trans-Canada Airlines to Air Canada as a single member initiative.

The government dealt with this issue in the Speech from the Throne. The Prime Minister dealt with it in his speech yesterday in the House of Commons. I think if it is to work the tone will have to be constructive and not just the pointing of fingers.

I hope the House leader could try to build on the foundation a number of us have laid here in the last six months.

Mr. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I have been here a little while now but not as long as the hon. member. I do not think anything I said was particularly nasty to the government. I did not call it a power hungry nasty name of any kind. I did not get into any of that. I just said that there was a real desire for change; that there has not been enough change; and that it is time, as the hon. member says, to set out with a constructive effort to try to move it forward.

I brought forward my 12 proposals. They did not have a single word that said anything nasty about the government. The government House leader said that it was impossible, that the government could not do a single thing. I just said to the government House leader that it was interesting because most of the proposals came from the Liberal backbench. In other words, some of them came from the government House leader himself.

All I am saying is that when someone puts forward these ideas a signal is sent over there either from the Prime Minister or the government House leader. The signal is that they will not entertain

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very much of this junk. That is what they called it. They called it complete nonsense. They do not want to talk about it.

All I suggested was that when somebody puts forward proposals to make the place work better, a response saying that the proposals are interesting is not forthcoming. Why not refer them to a committee and perhaps in some way open up the committees to investigate some proposals? Of course it is not like that.

The government House leader said that he could not do it because it was unconstitutional. That is nonsense because the signal sent from the front bench by the Prime Minister was to show initiative but be careful because too much initiative is not good. It is called a career limiting move in the Liberal Party.

• (1650)

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I do believe that the government House leader, in response to the initiatives brought forward by my colleague, the Canadian Alliance House leader, said that it was dangerous to talk about parliamentary reform in the open. He said that it would be much better to do it behind closed doors. I was wondering if my colleague might comment on that perspective offered by the government House leader.

Mr. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I do think there are times when people sit down over a cup of coffee and kick around ideas. We would call those private meetings. Sometimes those are very productive. Those meetings go on around here and I do not think there is anything wrong with it. However, neither is there anything wrong, nor should there be, in taking what are sometimes difficult issues and having a public discussion about them.

I think we would all be well served, as would the Canadian people, if they just knew that the government was going to set out in the morning to accomplish the modernization of parliament. If they knew that alone, if that signal came from over there, the rest of it would follow in line.

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to participate in the Address in Reply to the Throne Speech which opened the 37th parliament.

I would like to acknowledge the election of our new Speaker, the member for Kingston and the Islands. Myself and my party congratulate the Speaker and look forward to working with him and all members to make the 37th parliament a progressive and responsive sitting. I also congratulate the Deputy Speaker and the other deputies who were elected.

We may come here from different parts of the country, representing different parties and possessing distinct points of view, but we are all here to pass laws for the benefit of all Canadians in this the

crucible of democracy. I am hopeful we will make this parliament more responsive to Canadians.

Having said that, it behooves me to say how disappointed I was with the government's blueprint for this session. While full of prose and poetry, the throne speech offered little in the way of rebuilding the trust of Canadians in this institution. I would have expected, given that MPs from all parties have expressed interest in reforming the operations of the House, that the government would have responded.

Regrettably, the government paid mere lip service and offered to look into electronic voting in the House and improving resources for the parliamentary library. As my colleagues have said, we all like those things. They are good ideas to look at. What I and many MPs, not just from the Canadian Alliance, are saying is that we expected major initiatives in parliamentary reform.

The status quo suits certain individuals who insist on vesting more power in the Prime Minister's office and within certain unelected individuals. It surely entrenches more top down power and further abuse of this institution, and diminishes the efficacy of elected MPs on how we represent those who sent us here.

Grassroots citizens and community groups feel that their opinions are not respected, nor are they heard. The throne speech further entrenches that feeling and ensures further excessive party discipline which stifles open discussion and debate.

Even the member for Toronto—Danforth has said that parliament does not work. One Liberal MP who sought your chair, the member for Lac-Saint-Louis, said that being on the backbench, members are typecast as if they are all stupid. No member of parliament should ever have to say that. These two observations are not glowing endorsements about the way we do business in this place.

Liberal backbenchers are not alone in their admonishment. During the election campaign the Progressive Conservative Party election platform said that we must reassert the power of the individual MP to effectively represent the interests of their constituents and play a meaningful role in the development of public policy. Their plea certainly fell on deaf ears in the Prime Minister's office.

The NDP member for Winnipeg—Transcona has championed parliamentary reform longer than most. He said that strengthening the independence of the committees of the House can do the most to achieve a better balance between party discipline and the independence of individual MPs. I must inform the member for Winnipeg—Transcona that his voice also fell on deaf ears.

• (1655)

The Minister of Finance may get the Prime Minister's attention when it comes to the issue of leadership of the Liberal Party, but the

minister has very little efficacy with the Prime Minister on the issue of parliamentary reform.

Allow me to elaborate by quoting the Minister of Finance. He said that they have been discussing the role of parliament and enshrining the values of the nation and its response to change, that it is an empty debate unless it recognizes the role of parliamentarians themselves, in our case, the 301 members of the current House of Commons. He also said that MPs must have the opportunity to truly represent both their conscience and their constituents.

It is little wonder that the Prime Minister bristles at the notion of being replaced by the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance at least understands those quotes we read from the four, five, six, ten, twenty Liberals who are frustrated by the way the House of Commons is working today.

It is tragic that at the outset of the 37th parliament, this watershed time, the government has missed a unique opportunity to implement key parliamentary reform changes and begin the new session in with a constructive spirit.

In early January the House Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition, on behalf of the official opposition, unveiled 12 proposals that would be a first step in rebuilding Canadians' trust in our parliament. What the opposition House leader was attempting to do was to put flesh on the bones on the issue of parliamentary reform and offer the government a document to consider and ultimately implement.

I recall the opposition House leader discussing the proposals with the government House leader in the afternoon on a CBC broadcast, *Politics*, following the unveiling of our proposals. The government House leader dismissed our proposals. It was not a good start. There was not a scintilla of receptivity by the government's guardian of the status quo in the House.

Even today in question period, we asked questions about change in a nice way. The government House leader came back with a smart aleck answer that we must know that committees are formed. Of course we know that committees are formed, we are part of doing that, but we also know that when we go to that committee, unless the Prime Minister and the government House leader advise their members that the committee should look at parliamentary reform and look at it in a free and open manner, it will never happen. I think the Canadian public is tired of these smart aleck answers, the know it all from the other side.

The government House leader is the one who made half the proposals that are in the proposal and yet he says that they cannot not work, that we would have to change the constitution. We all know how different it is when in opposition than when in government. Some of us on this side have been in government. We have been part of making change and we know that it works.

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We know that the mother of parliaments in Great Britain has made changes. The majority of its votes are free votes. The whips only come on when it affects the government's ability to govern. That is the way it should be in this House so that members can speak freely, not only in the House but in committees.

Let me identify some of the proposals we are talking about. Our first proposal called for an official commitment by the House to conduct free votes. An official commitment by the House to conduct votes freely without jeopardizing our parliamentary traditions would strengthen members' resolve to represent the wishes of their constituents. This happens in Great Britain and in Australia but does not happening here.

Canada should be one of the most progressive countries. I agree with our House leader when he talks about the Prime Minister's legacy. We would all support him in building that legacy. We know that the opposition is a minority compared to the government, which has the majority of seats. It can kill free votes at any time, but why not sit down in a committee?

I heard the member for Vancouver Quadra on a local radio show after he was elected. I appreciated what he said about coming here and speaking his mind, voting the way he should for his constituents in British Columbia. I have been around politics for a long time now and it does not quite happen that way, but it should.

I hope the member for Vancouver Quadra will have some influence on the members of his party who are a very frustrated lot. Not all of them because some are in cabinet and they have it pretty nice. The parliamentary secretaries make a little more money, so they are happy. However, there are a lot of people on the back bench who would like to participate a little bit more, knowing they could go to committee and speak freely, vote freely and bring messages back to the House. That is happening in other parliamentary democracies in the world. The greatest system in the world is parliamentary democracy but we have taken too long. The McGrath report, a colleague of mine back to the seventies, came in long ago and some very positive changes were made.

● (1700)

The Prime Minister talks about change. The election of the Speaker was a change made in the House which was very positive. Needless to say, I think we might have had a different Speaker today if it had not been a totally free vote. It allows members to have a little power in the House and we all need a little more of that.

I hope in the next few years I have left in parliament we can make those changes. I would love to be able to say to my seven children and eight grandchildren, who are coming quicker than I can count these days, that I was part of making these modern changes in Canada so we could have a better country.

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We all know democracy is there. We had a great election and the Liberals won. That is wonderful. Let us take this year to sit down in committee and try to make some positive changes for the good of Canada. If it is for the good of Canada, it will be good for the Liberals, the Canadian Alliance, the Bloc, the NDP and the Tories. If it is good for all of us, it is good for Canadians. We are as Canadian as anyone here, although the guys behind me are not too good at that. We are out to do what is good for Canada and we think more freedom and more access is good for Canadians.

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too want to congratulate you and congratulate the other speakers on their elections.

I am a bit intrigued by the Alliance's presentation today on parliamentary reform. I have been here since 1988. When the Alliance members came in during the last election, as well as the one before, they talked about the whole notion of MPs being able to vote independently.

If we were to look at the records over the past two terms, we would find that the Alliance voted in blocks far more often than any of the other political parties in the House. In fact, the whip used to stand up and say that it was the position of the Alliance unless otherwise instructed by their constituents. For approximately six years the Alliance has continually voted in blocks. If he wants to talk about reform, he should start complaining to his own leader to allow them to vote independently.

We do not have a problem on this side of the House for a lot of reasons. First, we have a lot more free votes on this side of the House than ever before in the history of parliament. We have a party system. We have to become accustomed to the fact that when we get elected as members of parliament, we do not get elected as individuals. We get elected as members of a specific political party with a specific agenda and platform.

To that extent, it is our individual responsibility to vote with the party and to vote with the government on all legislation that pertains to government and party platforms that were run on during an election. The Prime Minister and the government have given us more freedom and more rights to vote independently on government bills than any other government in the history of Canada.

When is the hon. member going to stand up to his leader and tell him and his establishment to allow the Canadian Alliance members to vote according to their conscience or to their constituents. When is he going to do that?

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, the member says he has been around since 1988, I have been around since 1972, and that members in the House have voted independently many more times than any other party. My colleague from North Vancouver voted for the gun bill even though he was opposed to it because that is what his constituents wanted him to do. The whip of this party has done that. That has happened in this party continually. My party believes it when it says it has free votes on this side of the House.

I am not attacking anybody's integrity. I am talking about a change. If the hon. member wants to get up and make this partisan argument, I will read some quotes from his own members.

The member from Lac-Saint-Louis, another veteran of both provincial and federal politics like myself, said that the system needs to be blown to smithereens. I agree with him, as do many of my colleagues. I spoke to him privately. I think there are at least 50 potential Guy Fawkeses in the Liberal caucus alone who would be glad to light the fuse. That was said by the member for Toronto—Danforth. If you want to do this, I will do you one for one anytime in the House. I will also do you one for one on the rules of parliament. I was a Speaker for a number of years and I know them well. I have been to London and Australia and have met most other parliamentary democracies. We are behind the times in this area.

● (1705)

Yes, we are elected to and support our party. The constitution of our party allows us to vote with our own conscience and that of our constituents. I respect the fact that in a matter of a confidence vote, because it was elected with a majority of members, members would vote with the government. Yes, there should be a whip. If I was a whip the members would be voting with me or they would not be there.

However, on every matter that is not a matter of confidence in the government or when we are debating bills in the House, we should all be free to say what we want to say. There are different regions in Canada where we may want to have a say on something. We should be allowed to that. We should be allowed to support different ideas and vote that way in the House. If a minister does not have a good bill, let the members send it back to be reworked. Let us get it right. That is all we are trying to say.

We can have all the partisan arguments we want but it is time for us to get a committee, get a bunch of good people in a room and start looking at the rules. We do not expect to win them all but we would certainly like to see some changes.

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin my comments by congratulating you on your appointment to the chair. Your experience here

in the House is going to serve you well, but for sure it is going to serve us well. I am looking forward to working under your guidance.

Since this is the first time I have formally spoken in the 37th parliament, I would like to thank the electors of my home riding of Brant for having confidence in me and returning me to Ottawa as their voice here. I look forward to continuing to work with them in partnership to strengthen the communities back home in the riding of Brant and to make sure that their voices are heard loudly and clearly here in Ottawa.

It is indeed with great pleasure and pride that I speak today in response to the Speech from the Throne that was presented by Her Excellency the Governor General earlier this week. One of the most important messages for me in the Speech from the Throne was a restatement, a recognition that we in the government understand that Canada is only as strong as its people.

In that context, the Prime Minister yesterday in his speech said that our most important investments are the investments we make in people. We have a tradition of investing in Canadians. We believe that there is a role for the Government of Canada to play in the lives of our citizens. We think of important programs like our pension system, old age security, guaranteed security and the Canada pension plan. Those programs are extremely important and have been inordinately invaluable as we have reduced levels of poverty among Canadian seniors.

The House might be interested to know that between 1980 and 1997 the share of senior women with low incomes in Canada fell from 40% to 24%. The pension system is working. It is vitally important. We need to continue to support it and ensure it is there for the future.

The employment insurance system is important. This is a program that is available to support Canadians who, through no fault of their own, find themselves between jobs.

In the last campaign we committed to Canadians to reintroduce the amendments that we presented to the House just before the election was called. I am glad to say that yesterday we gave notice that it is our intention to reintroduce tomorrow amendments to the Employment Insurance Act. I certainly look forward to that act being carried through this place at all levels. I look forward to hearing the debate in the House and the witnesses at committee.

We are all proud of our health care and medicare system. It ensures that Canadians have access to health services regardless of the size of their pocketbook.

In the most recent Speech from the Throne we got direction to turn our attention to some other important areas. We have to recognize that it is unacceptable for any child in Canada to suffer the debilitating impact of poverty.

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Yesterday the Prime Minister said "We must ensure that our children are a national priority". We will establish an investment timetable that will allow us to make real progress in ensuring opportunity for all Canadian children.

● (1710)

In that context we are not starting from ground zero. In fact, we have some very important developments that have occurred since 1997, not the least of which is the creation of the national child benefit, a very important and effective partnership between the Government of Canada and the provincial and territorial governments.

The national child benefit is part of the Canada child tax benefit. The Government of Canada provides income support to low income families with children allowing the provinces to take their savings from the social assistance system and use it to create and develop new services available to families with children. The whole approach is to take down the welfare roll and to make work pay. In the old system parents who were on social assistance and had the benefit of certain services for their children would have to give up those services to take a minimum wage job. It was a terrible moral dilemma for them.

With the national child benefit we have a new approach which increases the income available to those families with children and building a platform of services that is available to those low income families who are working. As is in the Speech from the Throne, I note that by the year 2004 low income families will be receiving \$2,500 for their first child and \$2,300 for subsequent children. That is tax free money and fully indexed. The provinces and territories and the Government of Canada know that this important undertaking will have a real impact on reducing child poverty in Canada.

There is another example of our very strong and increasingly strengthened relationship with the provinces and territories as together we focus on improving the lives of our youngest citizens. I point to an agreement that was struck on September 11 with the provinces and territories in the area of early childhood development.

The research tells us that the early years are tremendously important, those early years from prenatal time to age six. In that context ministers of social services across Canada have sat together. We have listened to stakeholders and we understood the research. We hammered out an agreement whereby the Government of Canada has identified \$2.2 billion new dollars that will be conveyed to the provinces beginning in April of this year for them to use to make investments in programs and services that support children.

We have agreed that there are really four priority areas in which that money should be invested: programs that support prenatal

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nutrition and infancy; programs that will continue to allow us to develop child care spaces and services; and programs that will allow parents access to the latest information. Also, parents want to do a good job and need to do a good job. We can provide information to them to support them in this regard.

The other thing we know is that these services are best provided at the community level. If they are really to make a difference, communities need to understand the reality of their neighbourhoods and the individuals they are supporting. Money can be used by the provinces and territories to help communities understand what services are there, what access levels are present, how they can fill in the blanks and augment the services so that children and their families get the support they need so that we have a healthy start in the lives of our children.

This is an important undertaking. I look forward in my role as Minister of Human Resources Development Canada to continue to work with the provincial and territorial ministers as we build accountability regimes, outcome measurements so that we know that when we are making the investments we are getting the results that we anticipate. It is a very dynamic process, very respectful of the jurisdictions of the provinces and territories but recognizing that Canadians expect us to work together and that when we work together we move ahead much faster.

There are some other aspects of programming that we believe can help us reduce poverty among Canadian children. They are identified in the Speech from the Throne. One such program builds on a partnership that we have had with New Brunswick and British Columbia. It is a pilot project where we have begun to look at other strategies of supporting lone parent families with children make the transition from social assistance into the workplace.

• (1715)

The self-sufficiency program is a pilot program where we offer to lone parents who find themselves in receipt of social assistance the opportunity, if they can find it, of a full time job. The first job they get is usually a low income one, but the Government of Canada tops up their wage so that they have the money they need to provide the services to support their children.

We found after three years that the results are quite encouraging. More social assistance recipients are working. They have higher wages. They are less likely to be living in poverty. They have improved their skills and experience. They are more likely to stay in the workforce.

We want to offer other jurisdictions the opportunity to pilot with us. It is not a grand strategy yet, but part of the modern approach of governance is to undertake pilots, learn from them and together build structures and strategies which meet the needs of different communities within provincial and territorial jurisdictions.

I would be remiss if I did not remind the House of a tremendously important undertaking to double parental benefits that came to fruition at the end of December. It is a fundamentally important approach to allow Canadian parents the choice of staying home for up to a year with a new child. The program is up and running. I expect it to be extraordinarily well received. I am glad to see the majority of provinces have changed their labour codes to ensure that parents will have a job to go back to. It will make a tremendous difference in the raising of healthy children in Canada.

As we were talking about that we came to appreciate that there was another workplace family issue we would have to deal with in a modern Canada. Sometimes we find that dual income working parents find themselves in a circumstance where a family member may be gravely ill. They are in the conundrum of having to work to keep bread on the table, to do the responsible thing, but someone at home is very sick.

In the context of our children's agenda we have committed in the Speech from the Throne to look at building an appropriate model of compassionate leave, so that the parents do not have to make a choice of going to work and supporting and caring for a gravely ill child. That will be a priority of the government. We will explore the appropriate tool in that regard, consult with Canadians and be back to the House to talk about those developments.

We have a comprehensive approach to focusing on the reduction of child poverty in Canada. We are building on some important developments in partnership with the provinces and territories. I am convinced that we will be able to eradicate poverty in Canada with the support of all parties in the House.

Another important message that we received in the Speech from the Throne was the understanding that the countries that will be most successful in the modern knowledge based global economy are those countries in which all citizens are able to realize their full potential.

In the context of the Speech from the Throne, we feel that an undertaking that is worthy of national focus is the building of a skills and learning agenda for the 21st century. Again, we are not starting from ground zero in that regard, but there is much we can do. Much more effort can be put into this undertaking if we work together.

In the Speech from the Throne we identify a number of approaches that we would like to implement as we try and build a tradition of life long learning in Canada. We all know the economy has changed tremendously. We all know it is unlikely for people to have a job and keep it for their whole career. They will go from one career to another. We know how rapidly changing technology is, how managerial and administrative practices change, and how important it is for all of us to keep current with those changes.

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We have set as a goal to try and build a tradition of life long learning, an undertaking of seeing one million adults engaged in some form of additional training, education and experience that will build on their own personal skills platform in the next five years.

• (1720)

One of the strategies we have suggested will work is the creation of registered individual learning accounts. Here we are going to build on another important program that was introduced by our government, the Canada education savings grant, where Canadians can begin to save for their child's education in an account and the government provides a top up. This system has been extraordinarily well received by Canadians. We believe we should model that so individuals can begin to save for their own lifelong learning.

As that system develops, we recognize that there is something more we can do in the area of student loans. Members might be interested to know that each year we issue about 150,000 student loans for full time study and only about 3,000 loans for part time study. However, we know Canadians want to learn as they earn so we believe we have to take the initiative and develop more part time study loans.

Again, we want to be very careful to work in tandem with the provinces and territories. There is an opportunity for us to continue to work to harmonize the student loan process. If provinces are interested in working with us, we will build a strategy of the part time loan initiative in concert and understanding of the undertakings of the provinces as well.

When we are looking at ensuring that every citizen can realize their full potential, we must turn our attention to those most vulnerable in Canada. We have to look at youth at risk, those who have not been able to connect effectively with society or the economy. We have to do what we can to ensure that they get a good start as they go out and become self-sufficient and contributors to Canada.

We have to increase the levels of literacy in Canada. Do members know that two out of five Canadians do not have the literacy skills to read a bus schedule, to read a map and to participate in so many of the jobs now that require technological understanding and competencies? As we said in the Speech from the Throne, we want to work with the provinces and territories to undertake a national initiative to upgrade the levels of literacy. That has to be a national challenge.

Canadians with disabilities are also very anxious to contribute more of themselves to the Canadian economy. They want to be part of the creation and the development of increased prosperity. Together with the provinces and territories, we have begun this

work at the table of labour market ministers. We want to build a labour market strategy focused specifically on the issues facing Canadians with disabilities. This is part of our challenge but I know that if we work together we can meet it.

New Canadians come very often with training and experience that we find very difficult to take advantage of. We have to find a system of more effective credentialing for new Canadians. This is again a challenge that we have set for ourselves in concert with the provinces and territories.

We do not have all the answers in the context of building a national skills agenda. These are some of the undertakings that we believe are wise to start now. They require us to work effectively with the provinces and territories but they also require us to go out and talk more closely with stakeholders.

I am looking forward to starting some national consultations with groups, such as the Conference Board of Canada, specifically focused on finding ways to ensure that we build the strategies that will support lifelong learning in Canada, that will allow us all, whether we be the Government of Canada, the provinces or territorial governments, the private sector, the voluntary sector, to rally behind a national skills and learning undertaking that will benefit all citizens.

There are so many other aspects of the Speech from the Throne that dovetail and build on our commitment to innovation and inclusion. These that I have talked about in my speech are ones with which I will be involved. I will need the support of members in the House, certainly in our caucus, to recognize the role our caucus has played in making sure that children are at the top of our agenda, and to recognize the importance of developing programs that speak to a modern Canada and the needs of Canadians to participate in the new economy.

• (1725)

The bottom line is that if people are trained and have the skills, the wherewithal and the support to participate fully in a Canadian society and economy, our country will be greater. That is the challenge we have set for ourselves. I think we have the formula.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech of the minister responsible who plays a big role in the distribution of wealth.

In the throne speech, two excerpts seem to reflect a vision of the past rather than one of the future. The old age pension plan is

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praised, and it has indeed worked well in the past to fight poverty. I would however have liked to find initiatives dealing with the current problems experienced by the elderly.

For example, for many women living on their own, with the cost of the food basket for their daily needs, the increase in the price of drugs, the increase in the cost of living and all other expenses, the existing program—and I will show this—no longer meets their needs.

There was no announcement to this effect, other than the fact that a plan that worked in the past had been developed. There is no message of hope.

There is another much more aggressive sentence in the throne speech. It reads, and I quote:

There was a time when losing a job also meant immediate loss of income for workers and their families. And so Canadians created employment insurance.

It takes a lot of gall to say such a thing in the throne speech. What was created 50 years ago was an unemployment insurance plan to meet this need. But all employment insurance has done since its inception is increase poverty throughout Quebec and Canada by tightening the requirements it set, by the fact that fewer people are eligible for it.

After the Prime Minister recognized during the election campaign that the employment insurance plan was a bad move, that it needed corrective action, are we going to find in the bill to be tabled shortly things such as an increase in the level of benefits from 55% to 60% and the elimination of discrimination against women and young people entering the labour market? Will Quebec be entitled to its own parental leave plan?

There are a lot of other situations. I would like the minister to tell us whether there will be something to help us reach this objective or do we have to be content with what was in Bill C-44, which was tabled before the election?

[*English*]

Hon. Jane Stewart: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked specifically about Canadian seniors, health care and health services. I remind him of the historic agreement that was struck with the provinces and territories that will see \$23 billion reinvested in the Canada health and social transfer, specifically to assist with health care. That typically will find itself supporting Canadian seniors.

I remind him of the work the government did in the not so distant past to ensure that our pension system, our pension programs, will be sustainable and will be there for Canadians. We know that it has had an impact on reducing poverty. We are committed to ensuring that it is there for the future.

With regard specifically to employment insurance, I am glad to see the hon. member continues to have an interest in that regard. He will be interested to know, as I said in my speech, that we intend to introduce legislation regarding employment insurance amendments on Friday. He will be participating fully in the discussion in the House of Commons and at committee, and I look forward to his interventions there.

There are some important messages to give there as well. The economy in Canada is working well. The best social program is a job. We have the lowest levels of unemployment in Canada in a quarter of a century, not only for men but for women. The youth unemployment numbers are coming down. We are finding the participation rates in the Canadian economy increasing.

• (1730)

The changes we made to employment insurance in 1995 are being reviewed every year. By and large the dozen or so changes have worked extraordinarily well. However, in reviewing those changes year after year we have identified some that are not working so well. Those will be the thrust and the content of the bill that will be tabled here, I expect and hope, on Friday.

Mr. Grant Hill (Macleod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the minister on her discourse. I listened carefully to her specific words, that she would like to eradicate child poverty in Canada. It is a very noble goal.

To help me to celebrate and to monitor the course of that noble goal, I wonder if the minister could define child poverty for me. This is something that I earnestly would like her to do.

I listened to a couple of speeches today that talked about 42% and 52% rates of child poverty in Winnipeg. If the minister could give me a definition so that I could monitor with her the noble goal, it would help me to cheer for the government as it reaches that goal.

Hon. Jane Stewart: Mr. Speaker, indeed there are different ways of measuring poverty. We can use LICOs or we can use market basket measures. The last thing I want to engage in is a discussion of what exactly the right measure is.

We want to ensure that children have a healthy start and the opportunity to participate fully in Canada and its wealth. Having seen global poverty levels being reduced in the last year, it is our expectation that we can redouble our efforts to make the commitments of the House of a decade ago become a reality.

Again I would point out that the strategies we have in place received a tremendous boost by the effective partnerships we have forged with the provinces and territories. Canadians want us to work together on these issues of national priority and together we will do so.

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One of the most important aspects of the early childhood development agreement is working together to establish baseline data about where we are today and where we will be as the moneys we have identified for families reach the communities and families with children.

I am glad the hon. member is looking for a results based strategy. That is precisely the approach we are taking in our work with the provinces and territories. It is precisely the strategy that we will build into additional programs and pilots we will introduce in coming years.

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Mr. Speaker, congratulations to you on your new position in the House. We came into the House together in 1988. I am sure we will get the same kind of wisdom that we saw from you as a member of parliament.

I want to thank the minister. She is obviously living up to the red book promise of introducing the EI legislation very quickly in this new mandate. That is appreciated certainly by myself and my constituents. I know the bill has not been tabled. We have not seen it. I doubt that this is in the bill, but I want to at least put it on the record.

One problem was that the previous bill did not address the boundary issues. I am referring to the disparity between rural Canada and urban Canada, which the Minister of Industry mentioned a couple of days ago in a radio interview. In other words, in bigger centres unemployment is much lower and in rural areas it is much higher, yet these areas are blended together.

It really hurts our seasonal workers. We have spoken with the minister on this before. The minister in her wisdom and the department were generous enough to change the rules. They will be incrementally changed over the next four or five years.

Getting to the point, is there any way we can address these boundary issues in terms of the disparity between urban Canada and rural Canada and seasonal workers in resource backed industries?

• (1735)

Hon. Jane Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I will wait until the legislation is tabled and not talk specifically about what is in it. I hope and anticipate that the hon. member will see it in its fullest form on Friday.

Specifically with regard to employment insurance boundaries, the hon. member knows that every five years the boundaries are studied, reviewed, and changes made as necessary to reflect changing employment patterns.

By and large the most recent changes have been effectively implemented. In some areas we are implementing transitional

measures to help with those changes. We recognize that one of the biggest areas of importance is seasonal work and seasonal workers. We are doing all we can to help to diversify rural economies in Canada.

I know the hon. member will continue to work with me in that regard.

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment. I do not know how many have done that but I am happy to do so. This is my third parliament, so we have obviously spent some time together as I think this is your fourth.

I want to respond to the throne speech. I was here, as hon. members were, on the day the throne speech was read. The first thing I did was, as everyone did, go for the area of the speech I thought would be most important for my constituents.

I ran for politics because I believed parliament needed some very basic reforms. I thought I might moderate or somehow change my views, but I have not. The longer I am here, the more I recognize that such reforms are needed.

Those changes are still very important to me and many of my constituents. Even now the lack of progress on basic parliamentary and democratic reforms is creating problems in Canada from a regional standpoint and is diminishing our stature internationally.

How would I know this? It is partly from being in the job for so long. I have met ambassadors, ministers from other nations, senators and congressmen from our neighbour to the south, people who have seen and experienced how it works in other places. One of the natural things we do is make comparisons.

It is overdue. I would say that if Canada were a more populous nation with more than the 30 million people we have, our system really would not work. What we have today only works because of our relatively small population.

Too much power resides with the Prime Minister and the Office of the Prime Minister. Members of parliament and other government and democratic institutions are neutered to some degree because of it.

• (1740)

I must return to the throne speech. I had to go to the very last page of the throne speech to find anything at all on democratic reforms. Guess what it says? We will look at electronic voting maybe and there will be more dollars for the library of parliament.

Those are both simple, straightforward initiatives that I do not think anyone in the House will disagree with but that is not

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democratic reform. Plain and simple, that is not what anyone who is interested in democratic reform was looking for, including an awful lot of government backbench members of parliament.

So where are we? In January, the Canadian Alliance House leader proposed a set of democratic reforms. These democratic reforms had a lot of support from the other opposition parties. They are not built out of thin air. These had been building for some time.

I would like to quote from the beginning of the document called "Building Trust". It is a quotation from the Leader of the Opposition who said:

Canadians are justly proud of our heritage of responsible government. But our parliamentary democracy is not all that it should be. Too much power is exercised by the Prime Minister instead of being shared by our elected representatives. Excessive party discipline stifles open discussion and debate. Grassroots citizens and community groups feel that their opinions are not respected or heard.

That is the Leader of the Opposition in his introduction to the document.

There were several things focused on in the document: free votes in the House of Commons; some changes to the standing committees; a call for a new standing committee on privacy access and ethics; and making the ethics counsellor or officer a true officer of parliament. I want to focus just on two of those reforms; free votes in the House of Commons and the ethics counsellor.

When we talk about free votes, there is an attempt to cloud what we are saying, so it is not clearly understood. That is why I want to focus on that.

Now, to best get at the free vote issue, I have to quote once again. I will quote the previous leader of the opposition during a debate on April 21, 1998. The one thing I have learned after three years in this place is the last time that one thinks one can say something is often the first time somebody is listening, so I am going to say it again.

There is a myth in the House that lurking out there somewhere is the fiery dragon of the confidence convention, the erroneous belief studiously cultivated by the government that if a government bill or motion is defeated, or an opposition bill, motion or amendment is passed, this obliges the government to resign. This myth is used to coerce government members, especially backbenchers, to vote for government bills and motions with which they and their constituents disagree and to vote against opposition bills, motions and amendments with which they substantially agree. The reality is that the fiery dragon of the confidence convention in its traditional form is dead. The sooner the House officially recognizes that fact, the better for all.

We are calling for an official commitment by the House to conduct votes freely without jeopardizing our parliamentary positions. That would be very simple.

The second issue I would like to talk about is the ethics counsellor becoming a true officer of parliament. Many of the members in the House will remember the Liberal red book from 1993. It states:

A Liberal government will appoint an independent Ethics Counsellor to advise both public officials and lobbyists in the day-to-day application of the Code of Conduct for Public Officials. The Ethics Counsellor will be appointed after consultation with the leaders of all parties in the House of Commons and will report directly to Parliament.

● (1745)

That has not happened. He reports to the Prime Minister. He is appointed by the Prime Minister. It is a conflict, plain and simple.

All these reforms are analogous to the little boy with his finger in the dike. There is a flood out there and instead of a wall of water we have a wall of opinion saying "we want changes". It is coming from the public and from members of parliament in all parties. We have a very select few who are resisting all of that.

I tell my constituents that we have to look at this not from a personal history standpoint but from the standpoint of the broader history of the political landscape. These changes will happen. It is just a matter of when.

In summary, the Prime Minister could be known for what he did, but he will probably be known for what he did not do.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with much of what the previous speaker had to say about the shortcomings of the throne speech. He did not choose to comment on what has to be one of the most glaring oversights, which we just witnessed when the Minister of Human Resources Development spoke about doing her best—I think that was the term she used—to help the most vulnerable and that the theme of this year's throne speech and this parliament had to be about helping the most vulnerable. Then she went on to contradict herself by saying that the EI system is yada, yada, yada.

Does the hon. member agree that the EI system is so completely dysfunctional that it has ceased to be an insurance program at all and is in fact used as a revenue generator, a cash cow? In fact, it is another tax on people's paycheques, because there is no insurance value from a program that denies over 70% of all applicants any benefits whatsoever.

Does the hon. member agree that one of the most galling things about this particular parliament is that the government side refuses to admit that it is using the revenue from the EI system for purposes other than income maintenance and benefits, that in fact the revenue from the EI system is being used as a cash cow, and that it is fundamentally wrong?

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of common ground between my thoughts and those of the hon. member. I will say that we have people on the CPP disability program that I do not think should be funded by CPP. There are people who fall between

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the cracks, between the CPP disability and EI and the provincial social assistance programs. There is room to do something about that rather than play within the current rules of the EI system. We need to think in a different way about people who are falling between the cracks. That has been very clear to me for some time.

Yes, the government is treating the EI system as a cash cow, and employers and employees are all being hurt as a consequence.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, congratulations to you on your appointment.

I thank the hon. member for his speech. In many respects parliamentary reform is something that has been talked about here for probably at least one generation. I know that it is easy for members on either side of the House to talk about it, probably when they are in opposition. The bullet comes, of course, when some party forms a government. Parliamentary reform becomes just terribly inconvenient or messy or really inefficient when a government is formed and is trying to blast things through.

On the specific issue of the ethics counsellor, I thought it was interesting. There is a huge difference between reporting to parliament and just having coffee with the Prime Minister, for instance, and tossing off a note saying everything is okay.

• (1750)

I would be interested to hear the hon. member give a brief comment on what has gone wrong since red book one.

Now very specifically, in regard to the symposium that took place earlier on Parliament Hill today when we talked about trying to do something practical about democracy, we heard from an expert source that it is not so much that the rules need to be changed, because we have all the rules in the world. We would be able to change them at will if there were unanimous consent, I am sure, on both sides of the House. The expert said that the rules are there to allow us to do whatever we want to do in terms of making sure that we really do have a working democracy, but he said that it was caucus culture, that there is a sickness there. I wonder if the hon. member could talk about any caucus culture on the government side that seems to be just desperately against this whole idea of really freeing things up.

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to give a 10 minute speech. Let me put it this way: we do not have an ethics counsellor who reports to parliament, but we have a privacy commissioner and an access to information commissioner who do. Those relationships have worked well. We want it to work even better and so do they. They welcome the creation of a new parliamentary committee to look after privacy, access and ethics. That in a nutshell is what I think should be done.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with honour and a great sense of pride in representing in this magnificent House the people of Crowfoot. It is a privilege to stand here today and address the members of parliament in my maiden speech.

Mr. Speaker, before I proceed, I commend you on your service in the Chair. A number of members have told the House about your service over the years. We appreciate it.

May I also make mention of and congratulate our Speaker on his victory? When he was chosen, he spoke about fulfilling a dream to serve as Speaker in the House. It is rare that we can fully achieve our dreams. I have come to realize that I will never fulfil all my dreams. I will never score the winning goal in a Stanley Cup playoff game or play in the PGA. Indeed, I will probably never throw a pitch in the World Series. Standing here today, however, I recognize that I have fulfilled one dream.

I therefore begin by sincerely thanking the numerous volunteers who selflessly and diligently assisted with my campaign. It was undoubtedly the collective effort of all those involved that resulted in my victory and the victory for the Canadian Alliance in a very difficult and, in some respects, very emotional campaign in Crowfoot.

I would like to thank God for allowing me the privilege of serving the people of Crowfoot and Him in parliament. I would also like to pay special tribute today to my family, to my parents and my in-laws, and to my wife Darlene and our two children, Kristen and Ryan, who are here with me today, in the gallery, as they are every day. If it were not for my family and their love and support, I would not be in this House.

Finally, I thank all the people of Crowfoot for bestowing their faith in me. I promise to respectfully and truthfully represent their views and concerns here. I pledge to work hard, with the same diligence that the majority of the people of Crowfoot demonstrate daily as they go about their occupations and their careers in our predominately rural riding.

As mentioned earlier, I would not be here if it were not for my family. I think it is safe to say that the majority of my colleagues share this with me. The family truly is the foundation of our society. Therefore, in order to have a socially and economically vibrant nation, it is imperative that we have strong families.

Yesterday's throne speech clearly indicates that this Liberal government does not share this view. I am thankful that this view is a view that is prevalent within the Canadian Alliance and among our many supporters.

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• (1755)

Although there was mention in the throne speech of children and families and children and poverty, there was no talk of proposals for addressing the economic realities facing many Canadian families today, particularly those who are threatened with losing their jobs or with having less disposable income as we enter into these uncharted waters or uncertain economic times.

The government's pre-election mini-budget is, as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out yesterday, sadly outdated. It has been found sadly wanting. Clearly we need a 2001 budget that includes, among other things, more aggressive and immediate tax cuts. Since the Liberals took power in 1993, Canadians' disposable income has dropped by close to \$2,200 for every taxpayer, and taxes have risen over 37 times. This is not the legacy to leave Canadians.

We now pay personal income taxes that are 56% higher than those of the average G7 country. As if crippling high taxes were not eroding Canadians' disposable income enough, this country's citizens are now being unfairly burdened with excessively high fuel prices, so prohibitively high that some cannot afford to pay their heating bills.

While the Prime Minister may, as he stated yesterday, just be getting warmed up to the position of Prime Minister, the fact is that many Canadians literally are finding themselves out in the cold. I, as a federal official, can provide little comfort and hope to the many distraught constituents who are writing letters, making phone calls and dropping in on our Crowfoot office.

I understand from recent newspaper articles that the federal government has initiated a program called "Relief for Heating Expenses". Reports indicate that cheques of \$125 to \$250 will be sent out automatically to every Canadian who received a GST tax credit for the 1999 tax year.

Although I commend the government for recognizing the horrific burden placed on many individuals due to high heating costs, I do question giving the rebate only to those eligible for the GST tax credit in 1999. This is not 1999. This is not 2000. This is 2001. Quite obviously incomes have changed in the last two years, some for the better but many for the worse. This rebate does not guarantee that the people in need of financial assistance today will receive it.

I must also question why the federal government has failed to address soaring energy costs and other input costs that are negatively impacting Canadian farmers. A forecast of farm incomes by Agriculture Canada suggests that Alberta farmers will be among the hardest hit in the country as the cost of farming continues to rise. Operating farm machinery has become more expensive as natural gas and fuel costs rise. So has the cost of fertilizing our

crops. The price of nitrogen fertilizer, with its key ingredient and process being natural gas, has risen from approximately \$390 per tonne as recently as last spring to a projected \$700 plus this year. Farmers are losing hope. The next generation is leaving and there is no one to take over the family farms.

Overall in Canada, net cash incomes for farmers are expected to drop another 6% this year. Despite this grim reality and the fact that more than two years ago the federal government promised to help producers struggling with slumping commodity prices, the federal government has failed to deal aggressively with its trade partners to lower international agricultural subsidies.

Although our Prime Minister mentioned yesterday in the House that he was going to the United States and would be speaking to President Bush, he still does not see the need to place our farmers on a level playing field with our competitors.

The federal government took decisive action to counteract the illegal export subsidies provided by the government of Brazil to its aircraft manufacturers. Pointing out the importance of the aerospace industry to the Canadian economy and the need to save 24,000 jobs, the federal government moved quickly to provide subsidies to Bombardier to enable them to better compete with major competitors.

• (1800)

Over the last year within the agricultural industry we have lost almost the equivalent of Bombardier's entire workforce. Approximately 22,000 farmers or persons in related farm occupations are out of business.

The western grain and oilseeds industry provides tremendous value to the Canadian economy. In 1999 it was valued at over \$70 billion. That value is steadily and very quickly diminishing.

Due to the effects of subsidization around the world, market receipts for grain and oilseeds have been dropping for many years and are expected to continue to decline. In Saskatchewan, where grain and oilseeds are the dominant industry, total net income is predicted to be negative in 2001, 2002 and 2003.

We need to immediately develop and implement assistance packages for our producers to stem the exodus of farm workers and the destruction of the Canadian family farm.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on all sides of the House to find meaningful and long term solutions for reducing input costs and providing a stable and deliverable assistance to our farmers. Every business in rural Alberta, in Oyen, Drumheller, Stettler, Camrose, Wainwright, Provost and Hanna, all farming communities within our constituency, is dependent on a strong agricultural sector and therefore dependent on us to provide viable solutions.

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As one of the Canadian Alliance deputy justice critics, I also welcome the opportunity to help find the means to truly make our streets and communities safer for the sake of my children and for all Canadian children.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am truly impressed with the new member who has joined us in our party in parliament. He is clearly very articulate. He has well thought ideas and it is quite obvious he is very capable of expressing them.

I should like to ask him one question with respect to the farm crisis and the fact that in the throne speech there was nothing about the farm crisis. He made an allusion to the fact that there was lots of money for Bombardier but seemingly none for farmers.

What does he see as both the short term solution to the farming crisis? What should be done in terms of giving them a long term solution so that they can be viable and so that our agricultural community can grow, be strong, be reliable and actually form part of our national security as we go on in coming years?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I would begin to answer that question by saying that I am a farmer. I understand the concerns and the frustrations.

As we campaigned throughout my constituency last year, people in the communities I mentioned such as Oyen, Drumheller and Stettler told us that if we were to help rural Alberta then we should help the agricultural sector. As we go into the spring it is very clear many farms are just not viable and are asking for help from the government. There is a crisis that will eventually go away if we leave it, but so will all the farmers who are in crisis.

We need a government that is willing to act now, to tell us that it is committed to helping the farmers now, and to tell western Canadian and Canadian agriculture that it believes in that sector of society and will help now. A cash influx before the spring crop is put out is needed now.

I challenge the government today to say that western Canada and agriculture are important and that it will do what is needed. That is the short term plan.

We also need a long term plan. We have to look at ways of helping in the Income Tax Act. Farming is the only industry that pays retail for everything it gets and sells wholesale. For everything we purchase we pay taxes and freight charges when it comes in. For everything we sell we pay the freight before it leaves. Transportation is another issue we have to deal with in the long term, and of course the Canadian Wheat Board. We need changes to make the Canadian Wheat Board more accountable and changes that will help Alberta, the west and Canadian agriculture before it is too late.

• (1805)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to welcome the newly elected member for Crowfoot and compliment him on a very good maiden speech.

He raised two things that are of special interest to me as a resident of Manitoba. The first was the agricultural crisis, and I thank him for outlining that issue in great detail.

The other issue that the member raised and on which I would like him to expand somewhat is the crisis in fuel costs, be it home heating fuel, gasoline, diesel, natural gas or anything else.

Would the member agree that the federal government has some role to play in trying to regulate and intervene at this point to put some sense of order to the spiralling, out of control, skyrocketing fuel costs that affect all of us and especially farmers? Would he agree that we need a regulatory commission to act as a regulatory body that would intervene on behalf of Canadians to put some order into the fuel cost crisis?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, as we have just begun a new term and as a rookie member of parliament, I have been a little overwhelmed by the number of phone calls I, and I am sure every member of the House, have received with regard to a number of issues, including agriculture and heating costs. I spoke about the issue of heating costs in my maiden speech because it was one of the issues that my constituents were very concerned about.

Canada has a number of things that we deem to be essential services and, with our climate, I think heating costs also need to be deemed an essential service. I applaud the government for its initiative in giving a rebate to consumers. It needs to continue to look at ways to put money back into the hands of those who especially need it.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment. I would also like to thank the people of Mississauga South who elected me for the third time. I am very honoured to be here to represent my constituents and to work hard on behalf of all Canadians.

The throne speech 2001, which has been outlined so eloquently today by many members, provides the framework under which we will govern the country over this mandate. Our plan seeks to ensure a brighter future for all Canadians and to strike the right balance. It includes provisions for paying down debt, cutting taxes fairly, investing in health care, investing in research and innovation, investing in families and children and protecting our environment, just to name a few.

As a parliamentarian since 1993, most of my private member's initiatives have been directed at areas relating to family and children. There is a specific section in the throne speech which

The Address

deals with various initiatives that we will be undertaking during this parliament. I want to take the time now to follow the focus on families and children, particularly on the issue of fetal alcohol syndrome.

The brain drain is a concept with which most members are familiar. It refers to the migration of our so-called best and brightest from Canada to the U.S. and abroad. It is a figurative term but it can be looked at literally as well. In a literal sense, brain drain is the physical effect of fetal alcohol syndrome, often referred to as FAS. Fetal alcohol syndrome is the real brain drain that we have to address and it is a 100% preventable tragedy.

On December 7, 1995, I first spoke in the House of Commons about fetal alcohol syndrome. It was part of my private member's bill, Bill C-237. That bill sought to provide health warning labels on the containers of alcoholic beverages to caution expectant mothers and others of the risks associated with alcohol consumption.

When I became a member of parliament one of the things I wanted to do was to become involved on the health committee. I did some research to find out what the health committee had been working on during the 34th parliament.

• (1810)

One of the things that I came across was a study called "Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, A Preventable Tragedy" produced by a House of Commons standing committee. I quote from the summary phraseology contained in the report:

Today, there is no question that maternal alcohol consumption can have devastating impacts on the fetus. The basic fact is that when the pregnant woman drinks, her unborn child drinks also; that is, the alcohol in the mother's bloodstream circulates through the placenta and into bloodstream of the fetus. It is possible that the blood-alcohol level in the fetus will remain at an elevated level for a longer period than that of the mother because the immature fetal liver metabolises the alcohol more slowly.

They said there was a problem and laid out some recommendations, which fascinated me. The reason that I was fascinated by the study was that I was an educated person who was active in my community. I was on a hospital board, had three children, and it was the first time that I had ever heard the term fetal alcohol syndrome. It had a tremendous impact on me. How was it possible that a preventable tragedy did not come to the attention of an ordinary person in the community? It was something that I wanted to get involved in.

I have been active in the issue and I wanted to learn more about it. In any one week as many as 10,000 babies are born in Canada. Of these, 3 are born with muscular dystrophy, 4 are born with HIV infection, 8 are born with spina bifida, 10 are born with Down's syndrome, 20 are born with fetal alcohol syndrome and over 100 are born with other alcohol related birth defects.

Fetal alcohol syndrome refers to a group of physical and mental birth defects. Its primary symptoms include growth deficiency before and after birth, central nervous system dysfunction resulting in learning disabilities, and physical malformalities in the face and cranial areas. Other alcohol related birth defects involve central nervous damage like FAS without the physical abnormalities.

FAS is incurable. Once someone has it, it will affect that person for the rest of his or her life. Most victims usually require special care throughout their lives. Depending on the severity, the estimated lifetime cost for the care of an FAS victim ranges from \$3 million to \$6 million.

There are secondary systems. What happens to people who have FAS? Their lifestyles are characteristic. Here are a few examples: 90% have mental health problems; 60% will be expelled or suspended from school or drop out of school; 60% will get into trouble with the law; 50% will exhibit inappropriate sexual behaviour; 30% will abuse drugs or alcohol; 80% will be incapable of living independently; and 80% will have problems in their employment situations. Tragically, these severe problems could have been prevented if the mother had abstained from alcohol consumption through her pregnancy.

Last year, I took the opportunity to look at some of the recent data from Manitoba and Saskatchewan resulting from work on FAS. One of the things I found is that they have surveyed their inmate population and found that 50% of the population in the jails in Manitoba and Saskatchewan were people who had fetal alcohol syndrome or other alcohol related birth defects.

I posed the same question during question period to the Minister of Justice. I asked her, what is the experience of the government in the federal institutions? She confirmed in the House that persons with fetal alcohol syndrome account for 50% of the inmates in our jails.

The dollars involved here are enormous. The impact on our justice system, health care system, social services system and on our education system are enormous and pervasive. The costs are enormous. It is one of the reasons why I am so delighted that the government has decided to take the initiative as part of its priorities. I hope the House will support initiatives related to the reduction of FAS.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I would like to inform the member that there will be 13 minutes left in his speech if he wishes to continue tomorrow.

It being 6.15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the subamendment now before the House.

• (1815)

[Translation]

The question is on the amendment to the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment to the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): All those in favour of the amendment to the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Call in the members.

(The House divided on the amendment to the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 1)

YEAS

Members

Asselin	Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bellehumeur	Bergeron
Bigras	Bourgeois
Brien	Cardin
Crête	Dalphond-Guiral
Desrochers	Dubé
Duceppe	Fournier
Gagnon (Champlain)	Gagnon (Québec)
Gauthier	Girard-Bujold
Guay	Guimond
Laframboise	Lalonde
Lancôt	Lebel
Loubier	Ménard
Paquette	Perron
Picard (Drummond)	Plamondon
Rocheleau	Roy
Sauvageau	St-Hilaire
Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)	Tremblay (Rimouski-Neigette-et-la Mitis)
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Anders	Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Anderson (Victoria)	Assad
Assadourian	Augustine
Bagnell	Baker
Bakopanos	Barnes
Bélair	Bélanger
Bellemare	Bennett
Bertrand	Bevilacqua
Binet	Blaikie
Blondin-Andrew	Bonin
Bonwick	Boudria
Bradshaw	Breitkreuz
Brisson	Brown
Bryden	Bulte
Burton	Byrne
Caccia	Cadman
Calder	Cannis
Caplan	Carignan
Carroll	Castonguay
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Charbonneau	Chrétien
Clark	Coderre
Collenette	Copps
Cotler	Cullen
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Dhaliwal	Dion
Dromisky	Duhamel
Duncan	Duplain
Easter	Eggleton
Epp	Eyking
Farrah	Finlay
Folco	Forseth
Fry	Gagliano
Gallant	Galloway
Godfrey	Goodale
Graham	Gray (Windsor West)
Grewal	Grey (Edmonton North)
Grose	Guarnieri
Harb	Harris
Harvard	Harvey
Hearn	Hill (Macleod)
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	Hinton
Hubbard	Jackson
Jaffer	Jennings
Jordan	Karetak-Lindell
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore)
Kenny (Calgary Southeast)	Keyes
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)	Knutson
Kraft Sloan	Laliberte
Lastewka	LeBlanc
Lee	Leung
Lincoln	Longfield
Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
MacAulay	MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)
Macklin	Mahoney
Malhi	Maloney
Manley	Mark
Marleau	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Matthews
Mayfield	McCallum
McCormick	McDonough
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough East)
McLellan	McNally
McTeague	Meredith
Mills (Red Deer)	Mills (Toronto—Danforth)
Minna	Mitchell
Moore	Murphy
Myers	Nault
Neville	Normand
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	O'Reilly
Obhrai	Owen
Pagtakhan	Paradis
Parrish	Penson
Peric	Peterson
Pettigrew	Phinney
Pillitteri	Pratt
Price	Proulx

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Redman	Reed (Halton)
Regan	Reynolds
Richardson	Ritz
Robillard	Rock
Saada	Savoy
Scherrer	Schmidt
Scott	Serré
Sgro	Shepherd
Skelton	Solberg
Sorenson	Speller
St. Denis	St-Jacques
St-Julien	Steckle
Stewart	Stinson
Strahl	Szabo
Telegdi	Thibault (West Nova)
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
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PAIRED MEMBERS

*Nil/aucun

The Speaker: I declare the amendment to the amendment lost.*[English]*

It being 6.45 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.45 p.m.)

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