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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, April 25, 2002

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 25, 2002

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

• (1000)

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

NATIONAL ANTHEM

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I note there is some controversy in the media about my singing different lyrics to O Canada and there may even be some concern among members in the House as to the appropriateness of what I did.

I wish to put on record that in retrospect I probably should have confined myself to arguing for the more inclusive language which I hope some day will come to pass. I did not mean any disrespect for our national anthem. If I have offended anyone, I offer my sincere apologies.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[English]

PETITIONS

ARMENIA

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of tabling a petition that calls on the federal government to officially recognize the 1915 to 1922 genocide which resulted in the deaths of 1.5 million Armenians.

The petition designates April 24 as the day of commemoration of the Armenian genocide. In accordance with the UN convention and the prevention and repression of genocide acts it condemns attempts to negate the genocide. The purpose is to develop understanding, heal wounds and promote friendship among all Canadians in accordance with the Canadian tradition of promoting human rights, peace and the rule of law in international affairs.

[Translation]

TAIWAN

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to present a petition that I had signed by about 60 people yesterday.

The petitioners are asking the government to support Taiwan's legitimate request to be admitted as an observer at the annual general meeting of the World Health Organization, which will be held on May 14, 2002, in Geneva.

The fact that Taiwan is an important tourism and business destination that receives 10 million travelers a year makes it more vulnerable to epidemics. At the same time, that state—since it is not a country—has developed an expertise in the area of vaccination, particularly against hepatitis B.

For these reasons, we are asking the government to follow up on various statements and to recognize Taiwan at the WTO.

[English]

FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and privileged to present a petition signed by a great number of Canadians who are concerned about the rising incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome in our society. They want to see action taken with respect to prevention of this devastating syndrome.

The petitioners call upon parliament to enact a motion that was passed a year ago for labels on all alcohol beverage containers. They call upon parliament to mandate the labelling of alcoholic products to warn pregnant women and other persons of certain dangers associated with the consumption of alcoholic beverages.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by thousands of first nations citizens in the province of Manitoba.

The petitioners reject the first nations governance initiative put forward by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. They suspect it to be nothing more than a thinly veiled effort to either extinguish or diminish their treaty rights. They point out further that the minister's consultation process has been a sham and they serve notice that they will present more names on these petitions than the minister did in his consultation process.

*Supply***QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

Mrs. Karen Redman (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

• (1010)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege with regard to the private member's area, specifically adjournment proceedings.

On Tuesday, April 23, I was given notice that there was an adjournment proceeding to be dealt with in the House on Tuesday evening, brought forward by the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster. I was advised on the morning of the 23rd that the member approached the private members' office to ask that the question be dealt with that very night.

As is the case with all adjournment proceedings, parliamentary secretaries are required to properly prepare to respond to the matters being raised by hon. members on a current basis, and I did that.

The member in question was in the House for votes that evening which took place after government orders and then private members' business followed by one hour. Following that it was the order of the House to deal with adjournment proceedings. The member did not show up for those adjournment proceedings.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): My hon. colleague was referred to the fact that this specific member was absent. He knows full well that he cannot say that in the House.

On the other hand, on the question of privilege itself, it is not up to the Chair to manage a member's time or even his or her presence in the House. Therefore, I do not think the member has a question of privilege, but if he wanted to make a statement, he has.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, one of the significant points of privilege members can raise is that their ability to do their job has been interrupted or interfered with. I was here to do my job and the table did not advise—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Order, please. I do not think the Chair has to listen to the fact that one member can pass judgment on another member's carrying out of his or her duties. I think the member is carrying it a bit far. I suggest the member take it up personally with the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster by giving him a call or meeting with him personally. This should be the end of the question of privilege.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I do not believe what the member opposite is raising is a question of privilege. You have already dealt with the issue and that is the end of it. If he continues to raise this, the issue is between him and another member and it should be dealt with that way. The time being wasted in the House is inappropriate.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, my point has to do with the table. My privilege item is basically that the table did not give me notice of a change in the orders of the day that required me to be here at a particular time.

The rules with regard to the particular item we are talking about is that everyone has a responsibility. This has happened far too often and I believe it is up to the table officers to advise a member when a matter on the adjournment proceedings is cancelled so the member can make arrangements to do other work.

I have raised this as a question of privilege because my ability to do my job was interfered with because the table failed to do its job. It was unfair to me as a member and in fact is unfair to all members.

• (1015)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I am advised by the clerk that indeed the table was notified that the hon. member would not be present. The clerk, and the Chair for that matter, also acknowledge that the hon. member should have been notified so he would not have had to wait for an hour to make his presentation. We will investigate the matter and get back to the hon. member.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ) moved:

That this House condemn the government for its inability to defend the workers at the General Motors plant in Boisbriand and thus allowing the vehicle assembly sector of the Quebec auto industry to disappear.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I want to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes.

The issue of the General Motors plant in Boisbriand is a priority. It is as labour critic that I will address the House today. We have known for a long time that there is a problem at the plant. Now the company is threatening to shut it down by September 2002. The reason we decided to raise this issue on an opposition day is to prompt the government to take action on this immediately, before the Quebec auto industry disappears completely. I do not mean to be alarmist, but the industry has been present in Quebec for 37 years. This particular plant is the largest in the province.

Since I have only ten minutes, my colleagues will take over when I am done. However, I will try to give a brief overview of the situation. I hope that, today, we will have a chance to shed some light on this issue and to try our best to find solutions so that the GM plant does not shut down in September 2002.

Supply

I must state at the outset that the Bloc Québécois unreservedly supports the FTQ and its affiliated union, the Canadian Auto Workers or CAW, in their fight to save the Boisbriand plant. If the Boisbriand assembly plant disappears, 1,400 direct jobs will disappear along with it. As well, there are another 9,000 or so indirect jobs with subcontractors, particularly the GM suppliers in the Beauce, the Outaouais, the Eastern Townships and southwestern Montreal, all at risk of closure as well.

The Boisbriand plant manufactured 74,967 vehicles in 2000, which is 7.75% of the total Canadian production. It has even been cited as a model plant for all other GM plants worldwide.

In 1987, Quebec and Ottawa made a \$220 million loan to GM, with a 30 year term, that is until 2017. The preferential rate of interest at the time was 9.5%. The long term financing of this loan costs GM a good \$20 million annually in interest charges to Quebec and Ottawa. The costs are shared fifty-fifty. Quebecers have paid for this loan to GM through their various taxes, and will continue to do so.

The main condition attached to the loan at the time was that the company maintain a minimal level of activity at Boisbriand, which it obviously has not. Moreover, GM is not required to pay back any of the capital before the due date of 2017. Canada—which means almost exclusively Ontario—has always been among the major beneficiaries of investments in the auto industry, but not a single dollar in investments has been announced for Quebec in the first six months of 2001. During the previous two quarters, Ontario had ranked second in investments behind the United States. Various investments of several hundred million dollars each had been announced, particularly by GM in Oshawa, totalling \$300 million, by Daimler Chrysler in Windsor, and by Toyota in Cambridge .

This closure represents a major loss for the region and confirms the resounding failure of federal policy. No attempt whatsoever was even made to influence the location of Canada's auto industry. While Quebec and the city of Boisbriand were frantically making representations to GM headquarters to save their plant, the federal government settled for doing the bare minimum.

The Bloc Québécois will see to it that Ottawa answers for its lack of leadership and concern for the situation of the Boisbriand workers.

Far from representing what is called the economy of the past, today's auto industry is the envy of countries from all around the world. It is one of the greatest users of computer technology and robotics; it uses the most advanced system technologies and material sciences and employs highly qualified workers and also engineers. We have been fighting for a long time to save the GM plant, and unions have done an absolutely extraordinary work to this end.

• (1020)

I myself took part in a demonstration by GM employees, with several of my colleagues representing the region, including the hon. members for Terrebonne—Blainville and Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, who are concerned with this problem.

Let us not forget that these employees work in high technology. They make good salaries. So, not only 1,400 direct jobs, but also almost 10,000 indirect jobs will be totally lost. This makes no sense

whatsoever. The whole Quebec auto industry is declining. For years, investments have been made in Ontario. Millions and millions of dollars have been spent on new plants in Ontario, and Quebec has always been left out.

Now that we are in dire straits, Canada is not supporting us. We need its help; we need our money, which we are sending it anyway. It should give it back to where it is necessary. We do not want to go through a second Mirabel in the region.

Mirabel has really hurt. Who salvaged it? It is the Quebec government, by making it a duty free zone. We are slowly salvaging the white elephant that Mirabel was to the federal government. It is the Liberals who messed up. Today, Mirabel is regaining momentum, through hard work, because the Quebec government decided to take steps to save the region.

The Quebec government has done its share. It has invested in the upgrading of the plant. It has always been present, but now the ball is in the federal government's court.

The justice minister was in Detroit. He met with the GM management. He did nothing to obtain some developments on the issue. He simply said "I do not know what program could work in this instance". That is not what we need to hear. We need to hear that there will be some positive, real and immediate action taken because September 2002 is only a few months away. Once the plant is closed, reopening it will be impossible and nothing will convince me of the contrary.

GM even threatened to dismantle the plant. This makes no sense whatsoever. We pay, we give money to the government to build a plant and the owners will now dismantle the building and move it elsewhere. This is rubbish. We cannot allow such a thing.

We must send people to Detroit. The federal government must wake up, send ministers and lobbyists to Detroit and see to it that they negotiate some arrangement with GM in order to save the plant so it can stay in Quebec. It is just unthinkable that there would no longer be an auto industry in Quebec. Once again, the federal government will show how utterly useless it is. This is unacceptable.

I raise the issue of Mirabel again because it is an issue that has been very important. Air Transat, which flew out of Mirabel, is now moving to Dorval. Once again, we are dealing with a hot potato. Why? Because the federal government has not kept its promises.

This issue needs to be raised, discussed in the House, we need to talk about it and the government needs to take real action on the matter. And it must not try to pull the wool over our eyes. The government has the money. There is a surplus. We have a surplus of billions of dollars. We are able to invest, to come to an agreement with GM to keep the plant open. The Boisbriand plant will close, period. It is one of the five most productive plants in the world.

Supply

When it was time to get this plant in order, when it came time for employees to improve production, they did it. The employees set to work. They held up their end of the bargain. Management was satisfied with the results. Now, they are going to say, "No way, it has got to go". We know how this industry operates. It lobbies, and it lobbies hard.

I do not have much time to go into all of the repercussions of this on employees. However, it is not hard to imagine the impact this is having on the workers. When, over a period of five years, employees are told that they will lose their jobs the following year, it puts constant pressure on them, and they do not need to deal with that.

•(1025)

Today, I am calling for a serious debate on this issue. The government needs to roll up its sleeves and act, to do what it has to do, live up to its responsibilities and ensure that the GM plant in Boisbriand stays open.

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a point in relation to this important debate today. Is this not what happens when political instability is created by the Bloc and by the premier of the province of Quebec who are intent on separating from Canada? These decisions are made by corporations. When there is political insecurity business will flow out of the province. This is not unusual. It has happened in the past.

If economic activity is to occur in the province would it not be incumbent upon the member and her party to talk to Premier Landry? He has not moved away from the idea of separation. There is still a cloud of uncertainty in the province of Quebec.

When corporations, like General Motors, decide to leave that is their decision. The Bloc members cannot come to the House of Commons intent on only accepting the best of what Canada has to offer. When some of this backfires on them, they conveniently look for someone to blame. In this case they are conveniently looking at the federal government. Are these not decisions made by corporations? Political instability is one of the factors that leads corporations to make these decisions in terms of—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The hon. member for Laurentides.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Speaker, this is 2002. With all due respect, nobody has ever refused to sell a car to a separatist. Business is business.

The aluminum company Alcan stayed in Quebec, and it has really prospered. Bombardier is in Quebec. This has nothing to do with separation. It is a question of economics and the government refuses to admit it. It is hiding behind the aspirations of Quebec to nationhood. It has nothing to do with it.

It is a business decision, an economic decision. We want to keep Quebec's auto industry. It is now the federal government's turn to help us keep this industry.

The Quebec government has done its share. The federal government should now give us a hand. It is helping Ontario and should help us too.

[*English*]

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for bringing the motion to the House today. She has asked for a substantive debate on this issue, which is very good, but looking at the auto industry in general, although it is concentrated in Ontario and Quebec, what specifically would she propose to ensure that the auto industry continues to grow and remain healthy across Canada? Is she proposing tax reductions or government assistance?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Speaker, the auto industry is concentrated in Ontario, not in Quebec. That is quite clear.

The federal government should sit down with the industry and discuss mid-term and long-term solutions. It is not for me to make a decision. There will be discussions and negotiations.

But what we really need are solutions that will keep this industry going over the mid-term and the long-term, and not short-term solutions from year to year. This is not the kind of industry you can deal with on a short-term basis. We should keep developing it. The industry is heavily concentrated in Ontario, but its development in other regions should go on. We have the opportunity to do it in Quebec. We should keep this industry going, and the federal government should do its share.

•(1030)

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, very briefly, one could wonder what the member for Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière is doing in this debate.

I am speaking up by solidarity because the situation the hon. member for Laurentides is describing, and I commend her for her speech, is somewhat similar to the one that the Davie shipbuilding people are going through. They have known insecurity for a long time and we are aware of the many problems that employees may experience, both individually and collectively.

I would like her to have the opportunity to expand on that point.

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Speaker, I will answer briefly because I know I have little time left and I want my colleagues to have the opportunity to speak.

When in an industry the continued production of some goods is unsure, that certainly causes an uncontrollable situation and the industry is in danger. Some stability has to be maintained.

As I said, government officials must sit at the table and get involved in the issue. They must go to Detroit to meet with GM. They will have our support and full cooperation.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the Bloc Québécois critic on industry, science and technology, I am pleased to take part in this debate on an issue that is of great concern.

I notice that the Minister of Industry is in the House right now and he will probably take part in this debate in a few moments. I am anxious to hear what the minister, who is a member from Ontario, will have to say, since this issue is not only about the loss of jobs in Quebec, at the GM plant in Boisbriand. It is not only about the closure of the Boisbriand plant as such; it is also about the disappearance of the vehicle assembly sector in Quebec.

It must be understood that Canada's auto industry is primarily concentrated in Ontario. There is only one assembly plant outside Ontario. That plant is located in Quebec and it could be closed as early as next September.

As we speak, the Bloc Québécois leader is holding a press conference in the presence of the Mayor of Boisbriand, Robert Poirier, the director of the Travailleurs unis de l'automobile du Québec, Luc Desnoyers, the president of the union at the Boisbriand GM plant, Sylvain Demers, and our Bloc Québécois colleagues from the Laurentians.

Incidentally, it is no coincidence if the whole Laurentians region is represented by Bloc Québécois members. This is because, considering what happened in Mirabel and what is going on in Boisbriand, the residents of that region are well aware that this government is letting them down. These people know that they will be well protected by Bloc Québécois members.

I am taking this opportunity to thank and congratulate my colleagues for Terrebonne—Blainville, for Laurentides—the hon. member who proposed today's motion—, for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, and also our former Bloc Québécois colleagues who sat in the House and who represented that region, namely Maurice Dumas and Paul Mercier, for all the work that they accomplished regarding Mirabel, of course, but also the GM plant.

Here is a brief historical background on the GM plant in Boisbriand. It was founded in 1965, the year of the Auto Pact. Boisbriand began its operations with almost one thousand employees. In 1979, their number had increased to 4,400 but two years later there were massive layoffs and the future of the plant looked rather grim.

In 1986, GM ordered the Boisbriand plant to reduce its production costs, otherwise it would have to close it down. Unionized employees agreed to many compromises to save the plant, which would become one of the most efficient car assembly lines in North America.

I believe this aspect must absolutely be taken into consideration in the present circumstances considering the fallacious arguments used to justify the plant's closing, supposedly because there were no new models to be built at Boisbriand.

The president of GM Canada herself admitted that the Boisbriand plant was one of the most productive of GM's plants worldwide. In those circumstances, what can justify the closing of the Boisbriand plant if not obscure considerations? I will come back to that later.

My colleague from Laurentides has explained well the economic impact the closing of GM's plant in Boisbriand would have on the Laurentides region. More than 10,000 direct and indirect jobs would

Supply

be lost, not only in Laurentides but also in the Beauce, the Outaouais, the Eastern Townships and in the southwest of Montreal. Those jobs could be lost due to the closing of sub-contracting plants or businesses resulting from the closing of the GM plant. Ten thousand jobs could be lost in Quebec because of decisions more or less easy to understand, more or less vague.

The member for Laurentides also mentioned the financial impact this decision will have on taxpayers in Quebec and Canada. In 1987, the governments of Quebec and Canada agreed to give GM an interest free loan of \$220 million over 30 years, until 2017.

• (1035)

At the time, the prime lending rate was 9.5%, representing annual costs of \$20 million for the governments of Quebec and of Canada. These are substantial amounts. My colleague, the member for Laurentides, pointed out that the sine qua non for this loan at the time was that GM would have to continue minimal operations at Boisbriand, a condition it is obviously not meeting. I am anxious to hear what the Minister of Industry tells us about GM's failure to meet this condition concerning the Boisbriand plant.

Are we getting doublespeak from the federal government and GM? I think so, because the federal government contributed generously to the establishment of the auto industry in Ontario. It contributed generously to the development of fossil fuel sources in Canada's provinces, leaving Quebec to develop its hydroelectric industry, a green industry if ever there was, on its own. The federal government cut off funding for the Varennes Tokamak, which was working on developing another possible source of green energy. In the circumstances, we are not surprised to see the government so reluctant to sign the Kyoto protocol.

Are we also getting doublespeak from GM? I think so, because GM turned down an offer from Quebec in 1999. In 1999, Quebec offered backing of up to \$360 million on condition that GM and its suppliers make massive investments and build a modular assembly plant in Boisbriand. Amazingly, GM turned down this offer from the government.

It is also important to point out—my colleague mentioned this—that GM made record profits during the first quarter of 2002. GM's profits have apparently gone up by 146%. This is not negligible. The company made \$791 million U.S., or the equivalent of \$1.39 U.S. per share, compared to \$320 million U.S. for the same quarter last year, or about 50 cents U.S. per share. GM therefore posted record profits during the first quarter. What is the explanation for plant closures under circumstances such as these?

Supply

Moreover, it is also important to point out that—and my colleague made reference to the investments that were made by leading auto manufacturers throughout the world—Quebec seems to be the only place in the world where these auto manufacturers, and GM in particular, do not want to invest. GM made massive investments in Tennessee, Portugal, Kansas City, Oklahoma City, Lansing, Russia, England and Spain. So, investing is not a problem for GM. We find it hard to understand why it cannot come up with a new model to build in Boisbriand, particularly considering that in March, GM announced its decision to resume production of the Pontiac GTO. Why not build it in Boisbriand?

We find it hard to understand GM's decisions. This is all the more difficult to understand since, on April 5, we learned that GM was about to announce the addition of a third shift at its plant in Oshawa, which would create 1,000 new jobs. This new shift would begin on July 1 and increase the number of employees at the Oshawa plant from 3,500 to 4,500. GM could call back up to 500 workers who were laid off in Oshawa, St. Catherines or Boisbriand.

We are concerned and we wonder about the reasons given by GM to close this plant. As for the government, it only paid lip service when the time came to support GM workers, that is when the previous Minister of Industry travelled to Detroit with his colleague, who was then the Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. In reality, they said "We do not really know what we are going to do. Be that as it may, we will do everything we can until the last minute". But since then, the federal government has not done anything at all.

• (1040)

In conclusion, what we expect from the government is that the Prime Minister will get personally involved. We hope that the government will drag its feet next spring when the automobile industry will ask for a 5% tax credit for this and another 5% tax credit for that. We hope that the government will show its reluctance to do so, in order to save the GM plant in Boisbriand.

[English]

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the Bloc members to answer a question about the political instability in Quebec that is created by their group in the House of Commons. As every economist will tell us, businesses get nervous when they hear jurisdictions in any country talk about separation. Bloc members must talk honestly and openly about that fact.

Let us examine the automobile industry and the strategic plans of the Ford Motor Company a number of years ago to invest in Canada rather than Mexico. It did so because of political instability in Mexico and the fluctuating value of the peso. One never invests in an economy where there is no financial security or political stability. Bloc members must talk about that and about Premier Landry's intention to separate Quebec from Canada.

This ties into the free trade agreement which is important for the automobile industry. Without us Quebec does not have a free trade agreement.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comment. I would recommend that he calm down a little because it is not good for his heart to get all worked up like that.

I would also recommend that he listen carefully to the answers he is given. He would not have to keep asking the same questions over and over again.

Finally, I would recommend that he put his old 78 rpm record player away because we are now in 2002 and it is about time we stop hearing these old well-worn arguments from the 60s and 70s. The economic scare does not work anymore to try and stop Quebecers from voting in favour of sovereignty.

During the recent economic downturn, Quebec's economic performance has been quite phenomenal. More jobs were created in Quebec than anywhere else in Canada in the first quarter of 2002.

These wild arguments do not stand anymore. A quick look at the economic statistics and investment level for Quebec and at the number of corporate headquarters in Montreal will show him that this kind of argument does not stand anymore. Wake up, friend. This is 2002.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Please address your comments to the Chair.

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, GM is not to be blamed for the economic instability in Quebec any more than it is to be blamed for the falling dollar.

Let us go back a bit in time and talk about QCM, Quebec Cartier Mining. When iron mines on the North Shore were hit by a slowdown and in danger of shutting down, and even when they did shut down, it was under Brian Mulroney. Also, a Canadian prime minister created political and economic instability by failing to conclude the Charlottetown and Meech Lake accords. Nothing was working in this Canada, and this led to the creation of the Bloc Québécois.

The Conservative member keeps repeating that the Bloc Québécois is creating political instability. But, before his time, a prime minister here in the House had been a president of Iron Ore, which, with QCM, shut down the mines on the North Shore. He did not succeed in concluding the Charlottetown and Meech Lake accords, so they are responsible for creating a difficult political and economic situation.

Is the hon. member for Verchères not starting to realize that today, one must stop looking into the rearview mirror and start looking ahead?

• (1045)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Charlevoix for his eloquent remarks. He reminded the House that these points of argument do not stand anymore. If there is political instability in Canada right now, it is because one of the people of this country did not sign the constitution.

As long as this issue remains unresolved, there will be what has been called "political instability", but it will not affect only the province of Quebec.

Supply

Let me establish a link between political instability, or so-called political instability, and our economic situation by reminding the House that, many, many years ago, at the time the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest is referring to, in the 70s, people often told us that in a sovereign Quebec, the Quebec dollar would only be worth 70 cents.

The No side won and the Canadian dollar is now only worth 63 cents. Should we have voted Yes so that our dollar would now be worth 70 cents instead of remaining part of Canada with a dollar worth 63 cents? That is the question I am asking the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest.

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.) Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to the motion introduced by the Bloc on the subject of the General Motors vehicle assembly plant in Sainte-Thérèse, Quebec.

I must say that the Government of Canada certainly shares the concerns of the opposition about the people affected by the closing of this plant.

As members may know, the closing was announced by GM last September, and it was scheduled to take place in September 2002. The reasons given by GM were as follows: overcapacity in the industry, and a decrease in sales of cars assembled in Sainte-Thérèse.

The Government of Canada has worked closely with the parties in order to find a way to keep the plant open.

With other partners, we supported the work of the Comité de soutien à l'industrie automobile dans les Basses-Laurentides. This is a working group of which the members of the opposition have surely heard about, since it is made up of the Canadian Auto Workers Union, business people from the region, and representatives of the Quebec government, the Parti Québécois and the Bloc Québécois.

In fact, the Government of Canada, through EDC and in conjunction with the Government of Quebec, has provided the necessary financial assistance for the committee's studies and other activities. Canadian government officials worked with the committee.

The committee, with the active participation of the Government of Canada, submitted numerous proposals to GM for the plant's survival. In particular, it proposed that it be used for the assembly of specialized vehicles, reconditioning and other operations related to the auto industry. There were frequent meetings between my departmental staff and GM representatives, and on each occasion they argued in favour of keeping the plant open.

My predecessors headed delegations to GM headquarters in Detroit, along with the present Premier of Quebec, in order to urge GM to do everything possible to keep this plant open.

Since taking over this portfolio last January, I myself have held lengthy discussions with Michael Grimaldi, the President of GM, concerning the possibility of using the Boisbriand plant for a new model. So far, despite the efforts by all those involved, we have not yet succeeded in this.

Despite these reversals, we are going to continue our efforts and to strongly insist on having a dynamic auto industry in Canada and in

Quebec. The industry employs some 150,000 workers annually and accounts for investments of close to \$73 billion. It remains an important force in the Canadian economy and the Government of Canada continues to consider it a priority to ensure its continuing growth and well-being.

The auto industry invests in Canada because of our highly skilled work force, competitive labour costs and excellent business climate, within which it can prosper.

I would also like to report that GM Canada has indicated that, although this has been a hard decision, most employees could continue to draw an income for up to three years, and the company will work closely with the auto workers and the governments of Quebec and Canada to put in place retraining programs and other transitional programs for workers who need to find other employment.

• (1050)

GM also said that it would try to replace the jobs lost by buying more parts from suppliers in Quebec.

The company announced that it would continue to buy parts from over 700 Quebec suppliers, for a value of over \$850 million annually. It is trying to further develop production opportunities for suppliers in Quebec.

The company also expects that its supply initiatives will create as many jobs in Quebec companies producing parts as the number of jobs lost in Sainte-Thérèse.

Naturally, we are concerned about job losses in the country, but we have not lost hope for the future. Far from it.

Despite the setbacks, Canada continues to be one of the best places in the world to do business. We will continue to work for Canadians in all regions of the country.

In Quebec, I have appointed my assistant deputy minister, Pierre Reid, to represent the Government of Canada on the Groupe de travail des intervenants du secteur de l'automobile created by the deputy premier of Quebec, Mrs. Marois, to help find ways of supporting the creation of opportunities for car assembly, parts production and research and development in Quebec's auto industry.

We also support the development of skills in connection with new light-weight materials, such as aluminum and magnesium.

We are favourable to the major new investments recently announced in the Quebec auto industry.

As members of the House are perhaps aware, in November, the Saargummi group announced an investment of \$40 million to build two new auto parts plants and create 800 new jobs in Magog, Quebec.

On December 3, 2001, the Société de développement du magnésium announced that it was investing \$34 million to build a plant for the production of magnesium auto parts in Boisbriand, which will create 100 new jobs.

On December 18, 2001, Bridgestone-Firestone announced that it was investing \$36 million to modernize its tire plant in Joliette and expand its range of products.

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These are very good news for Canada and very good news for Quebec.

I therefore believe that the auto industry in Quebec has a brilliant future ahead of it. I hope that all Canadians and Quebecers share my belief.

I hope that all members of this House will recognize this and that they will continue to work with us so that we can do everything necessary to ensure that Quebec's auto industry continues to grow and continues to represent a dynamic part of the economy in that province and in Canada.

• (1055)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister has very kindly invited us to continue working with him to ensure the growth of the auto industry in Quebec, and yada yada yada.

We are perfectly happy to continue working with him, provided that he appear to do some work. Right now, nothing could be further from the truth. The government is demonstrating no political will to solve, or to try to solve the problem.

If the government wants the auto industry in Quebec to continue to expand, the worst thing that could happen would be for the one and only assembly plant in all of Quebec to be shut down. We have no assurance, no indication that the Government of Canada has done the least bit since the last statement made by his predecessor and by the former minister in charge of Quebec's economic development, to the effect that the government would do everything within its power right up to the last minute. Since then, we have seen nothing from the government.

The minister spent all of his time in his speech telling us about GM's good news with respect to Quebec, the few jobs created here and there in the area of aluminum and magnesium. It would have been good for our colleague, the member for New Brunswick Southwest, to hear his comments. He would have been surprised to hear that, despite the fact—according to him—that there is political instability in Quebec, there are still foreign investors who want to invest in Quebec, because of the many advantages, particularly tax advantages.

The minister mentioned some good news as regards GM and job creation, 100 jobs here, 100 or so there in the area of aluminum and magnesium, and he reminded us of GM's willingness, in response to a proposal from the Government of Quebec, to emphasize aluminum and magnesium components.

My question is for the minister. What was his reaction to the announcement made recently by the American company ZF Lemforder, which makes aluminum auto parts for GM and which is, incidentally, one of GM's largest aluminum parts suppliers, that it has decided to set up in Ontario? This company has decided to set up in Ontario. What kind of stock are we to put in GM's commitment to purchase more from Quebec's parts suppliers, when one of the largest aluminum parts suppliers is setting up shop in Ontario?

Hon. Allan Rock: Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to stress that changes are occurring all over in the auto industry and not only in Quebec.

We are now witnessing a global restructuring of the auto industry and we have to face that challenge. In Ontario, we have also seen some plants being closed, jobs being lost and structural changes happening in that industry.

This is why I have met with the presidents of the big three, GM, Daimler Chrysler and Ford, to discuss a strategy for the future of the industry in Canada. I also spoke with Buzz Hargrove, with the unions and the representatives of provincial and municipal governments. So far, I think we have worked closely and successfully with the Quebec government, the mayor of Boisbriand and Luc Desnoyers.

We must steer clear of quarrels, bickering and political games and focus on the issue, which is how can we keep the jobs and expand the industry here in Canada, including Quebec. I have already mentioned the recent announcements of new jobs being created, for example at auto parts suppliers. I think there is a future, a promising future in Quebec for innovative materials used in parts. However, the answer will not be found in political squabbles. We should be working in co-operation and we are focused on that approach.

• (1100)

[English]

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I will just pick up on what the minister said in terms of moving this to a general discussion of the industry on what should be done and what the government policy should be. We did have a discussion at the industry committee after September 11 as to what should be done to ensure that the industry does survive and in fact thrive. Some of the suggestions included reducing corporate taxes, especially removing nuisance taxes like those on air conditioning, and of course ensuring border access and border security.

One specific suggestion I want to ask him about is the elimination of the \$1.3 billion capital tax. That was suggested by the official opposition at the industry committee. Later it was suggested by the finance committee. It was endorsed by the Liberal members on the finance committee. I want to ask him whether he endorses the elimination of the \$1.3 billion capital tax.

Hon. Allan Rock: Mr. Speaker, I endorse a wide variety of measures that will make Canada a more attractive place for automobile companies to invest and to create jobs.

Without commenting specifically on any of the tax measures, I know that when I met with the big three representatives in February they raised a number of concerns about our tax system. They asked for a meeting among a number of ministers, including myself, the Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Finance, so that we could have a discussion of all these elements with all the responsible departments at the table. We are working toward such a meeting.

They are concerned about conflicting regulations when it comes to safety or environment between Canada and the United States. They put on the table a number of very constructive suggestions about how we could remove some of the difficulties and irritants in the industry in Canada.

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I have had the intention of creating, and I have discussed this with the interested parties, a committee that would represent the industry and all interested participants to develop a Canadian strategy to deal with our place in the world in terms of automobile manufacture, assembly and parts. Taxes are certainly a part of that picture.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not question the minister's good will, and I congratulate him on his remarks, but that does not solve the GM problem. This is urgent. Come September, we will lose 10,000 direct and indirect jobs if the Boisbriand plant closes down. We need action right now. This government should do something. It should meet with GM. Decisions have to be made quickly. We do not need to be told that smaller industries are springing up around other industries. We want to know what the government is going to do with the issue of GM in Boisbriand.

What can the minister tell all these workers who are going to lose their job in September 2002? That is what I would like to know.

• (1105)

Hon. Allan Rock: Mr. Speaker, I think we have made it clear to all GM employees in Boisbriand that the Government of Canada is concerned about their situation and their future. It is clear because, in the last two or three years, we have worked hard with the Quebec government, the mayor of Boisbriand, the support committee, the Bloc Quebecois and the Parti Quebecois to find ways to solve this problem.

My predecessors in industry travelled to Detroit with Mrs. Marois and Mr. Landry to meet with GM executives and make representations. We suggested some approaches that were turned down.

As an international corporation, GM has had to restructure its operations to adapt to changes in the world auto industry. Since we have been unable to persuade GM to keep this plant open, we have to find alternatives, which is why we have considered job opportunities in the auto parts manufacturing sector for the people of Boisbriand. It is also why we have supported R and D for the development of new materials for the auto industry. We will continue to try to find alternatives.

We have no overnight solution to propose today, but we have worked very hard, and I am prepared to continue to do so. If the members of the support committee think it would be useful to go back to Detroit, I will be there. I will do everything I can to ensure that these people have a future. I am ready to listen to all the suggestions my hon. colleagues can come up with.

[*English*]

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this motion. I would like to read the motion at this time. It states:

That this House condemn the government for its inability to defend the workers at the General Motors plant in Boisbriand and thus allowing the vehicle assembly sector of the Quebec auto industry to disappear.

I would like to thank the Bloc Quebecois for bringing this motion forward and for allowing us to have debate on it, which I would like to expand to include the entire auto industry in Canada.

I certainly understand the concerns of the Bloc Quebecois. Any time any plant closes in a local community it is a concern to all of us in the House. We need though to question what went wrong and whether or not it was government policies that contributed to the plant closure. We need to talk about the auto industry in general and move beyond generalities as to what should be done.

I understand that Quebec in particular has been hard hit by the auto industry restructuring. That has been eloquently stated by members of the Bloc. A year ago we were all concerned about the GM plant in Sainte-Thérèse, today it is Boisbriand. As the industry critic pointed out, it is the most important plant in Quebec.

The auto industry is certainly an important one for Canada and especially for Ontario and Quebec. The Canadian Alliance would like to see the entire industry, parts and vehicle manufacturing stay healthy and even grow over the next decade.

However I will not be able to support the motion today for two reasons. They fall under the general subject that we cannot have government interfering in the marketplace in terms of one plant closing. I know sometimes that sounds harsh but that is just reality and it is important for us to deal with it at the front rather than to somehow intimate that we can politically prevent a plant from closing and then give people false hopes. Giving people false hopes is the worse thing we can do.

I was hoping for more specifics on the motion and more substance from the Bloc as to what it wants the government to do. It is calling upon the government to take immediate action. It is calling on the minister to go to Detroit.

As an opposition member, I would like to hold the government to the fire on any subject but I do not know what the Bloc wants the minister to do when he goes to Detroit. If GM wants to close a plant, these questions are good questions, but they are questions for GM. I do not see what the Minister of Industry, quite frankly as an opposition member, will do by going to Detroit to lobby to keep the plant open. I hope that Bloc members in their further speeches will elucidate on what they expect the minister and the government to do.

There are two specific reasons. First, the motion does suggest some form of corporate subsidy or corporate interference by the government and of course we in the Canadian Alliance certainly oppose that. Second, by pointing to a specific plant rather than the general auto industry, it also suggests adopting a regional approach to industrial policy to assist one plant in one location.

As you probably know, Mr. Speaker, being the wise man that you are, the Canadian Alliance does not support corporate welfare and is very skeptical of the current government's regional development policies.

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Instead what we argue for is a more comprehensive and aggressive approach which is tax cuts coupled with a concerted effort by the government to get out of the marketplace. This in our view would be a better solution to the problem of plant closings in Canada and to the general economic problems of low productivity, which the minister has pointed out that we have suffered for a decade now.

I would now like to turn to the particulars of the GM plant in Boisbriand. It is my understanding that the plant is geared to making rear-wheel drive cars and the demand for these types of cars in North America is extremely low. According to the Montreal *Gazette* of October 16, 2001, GM Canada has made a business decision that retooling the Boisbriand plant would be much more costly than just letting it close. Therefore I believe 1,200 workers will likely lose their jobs in September.

I also understand from news reports that the Canadian Autoworkers union as well as other labour groups have put up quite a fight to keep the plant open, as they should.

According to the Quebec head of the CAW "There are 5,000 jobs in auto parts in Quebec and many of them will be lost with the announcement of the closure of the Boisbriand plant".

The lobbying efforts have been somewhat successful according to an article in the Prince George *Citizen* as part of GM Canada's commitment to offset the jobs that will be lost when the plant closes. A deal has been struck with an auto parts maker in Magog that will help create 800 jobs. However Boisbriand is not alone.

● (1110)

Without a doubt there is quite a bit of bad news concerning the auto industry in Canada in general. GM Canada is expected to cut more than 1,000 jobs at its engine and transmission plant in St. Catherine's Ontario. Ford and Chrysler have threatened to do the same thing. Just three years ago Canada was the world's fourth largest vehicle manufacturer. Unfortunately now we have fallen into seventh place.

However at the same time there is also good news. First, the most recent *Financial Post* 500 listing, GM Canada is ranked as the second largest company in Canada, Ford ranks third and DaimlerChrysler ranks ninth. In 2000, GM Canada had revenues of \$42 billion. My guess is that this ranking will change quite substantially when the new list is published because Nortel Networks ranked number one in 2000.

Second, car sales in Canada were up 17% in February. Just this week GM announced that it would increase production at 12 plants across North America because of stronger than expected consumer demand and a moderate recovery in sales to rental car companies.

Finally, Buzz Hargrove himself feels confident enough in this sector that, when the CAW sits down with the big three in contracting bargaining this fall, he is expected to demand more money and better benefits.

In fact it seems as if the entire Canadian auto industry is a bit schizophrenic at the moment. To quote from the recent *National Post* series on the auto sector, it said:

The big question—and it's one that divides industry watchers—is whether these current problems [in the Canadian auto industry] are temporary, or foreshadow a permanent downturn in a sector crucial to the Canadian economy.

We should consider the following statistics. Canada has expanded its auto vehicle production in 2001 from two million to three million vehicles, while its market share has remained static at 16%. GM, Ford and DaimlerChrysler are all openly discussing plant closings, but just yesterday David Dodge presented a very rosy picture of the Canadian economy, so much so that the Bank of Canada will now be raising interest rates.

Toyota is increasing production of its Corolla and Camry in Cambridge and Honda has also increased production in Alliston, Ontario. This really does present a dual picture of the auto sector. What is happening here? It is difficult to get a good read on the auto industry at this time since it is performing so well by industry analysts, yet these reviews are mixed, as are the signals being sent by the big three automakers.

I would thus suggest that since it is difficult for industry analysts to predict the future of the auto sector in Canada, it would not be wise for politicians from this place to predict how the next couple of years will shake out in the auto industry. How can we ensure that the auto sector will gain back some strength in Canada? For the Canadian Alliance that is a question and a matter for broader economic policy, not for government interference to prevent one plant from closing.

That brings me back to General Motors Canada. The president of General Motors recently spearheaded what many believe will be an aggressive campaign by some vehicle manufacturers in Canada for tax incentives. Last week the president threatened that Canadian plants could be prime targets unless important public policy changes were made quickly. He laid out a five point program of public policy changes he believed would stop the decline and put the auto industry on a competitive footing.

To summarize his points, he would first like a tax credit of five per cent of the value of new automotive investments, and another credit of up to five per cent for large companies based on employment with more than 5,000 people. He has suggested other tax breaks for training and rebates of EI and workers' compensation costs. This is all apparently to prevent a flow of jobs from Ontario to Mexico, he suggests.

Of course such a plan would exclude Toyota and Honda. Honda Canada Inc. and Toyota Canada Inc. each employ fewer than 5,000 people and therefore would not qualify for an investment tax credit under the proposed draft. To many of us here on the Alliance benches this is not fair and this request from GM Canada frankly sounds very similar to corporate welfare.

As we all know, giving subsidies to business, better known as corporate welfare, simply does not work. It offers no solution. To quote the Minister of Finance in his budget speech of 1995, he said:

—across government, we are taking major action...to substantially reduce subsidies to business. These subsidies do not create long-lasting jobs. Nobody has made that case more strongly than business itself.

We must then look at the Liberal record of corporate welfare. On June 22, 1999, Pratt & Whitney Canada Inc. received \$154 million from Technology Partnerships Canada. The press release stated that “[This government contribution] will help to safeguard jobs in our domestic operations by retaining value-added work in Canada”.

●(1115)

Nevertheless on October 24, 1999, less than two months later, Pratt & Whitney Canada issued another press release announcing 300 job cuts in Canada and a further 400 job cuts at unspecified locations worldwide, jobs the TPC grant was intended to help keep. It was the same story with de Havilland in the fall of 1997. TPC invested \$57 million into de Havilland which then decided to lay off 450 employees in Downsview, Ontario. Corporate welfare, the business of picking winners and losers, does not work.

It is the same with the government's regional development policies. I will paraphrase from the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies which said that far from boosting economic growth, economic development programs or regional transfers have politicized the economy. They have caused firms to focus on political connections rather than increased competitiveness. They have supported outmoded and often dangerous and environmentally hostile economic activities. They have driven out private sector investment, inflated regional costs and reduced incentives to work for further education and training.

The Canadian Alliance urges the government not to resort to government interference in the marketplace through corporate welfare or regional grants. It should instead pursue tax cuts to individuals and corporations more aggressively to create the general economic climate needed to sustain jobs in the long term. Surely money in the pockets of GM workers and the company would be better spent than money in the hands of bureaucrats or the Minister of Industry.

Canada's economic performance when measured against that of other G-7 countries continues to be of great concern to us in the opposition. We in the Alliance are worried that having the highest personal income tax burden in the G-7 and the highest corporate income tax rate in the OECD is having a negative effect on research and capital investment, thus causing the decline in productivity the Minister of Industry has pointed to. Despite some of the highest R and D tax credits in the world Canada is seeing declining productivity and a long term economic decline. In the world competitiveness ranking Canada fell from sixth place in 1997 to ninth place in 2001. This is serious. It must be addressed by the government and its general economic policies

What should the government do about the auto industry? In terms of the motion I would like to see more suggestions from the Bloc. If a company decides to close a plant as GM has, what do Bloc members think the government should do? Do they want the government to interfere in the marketplace in a specific region? That is not the answer.

What do we in my party think the government ought to do? It should reduce corporate taxes. At industry committee meetings

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following September 11 when most of the major industries appeared before us the auto industry was the main one. Auto industry representatives repeated over and over that they wanted reduced corporate taxes in Canada because for them the North American market is an integrated market. Representatives from Windsor and Detroit said they look at the area as one region. They do not look at it as two countries in economic terms. They look at it as one economic region. We must look at it that way as well.

Representatives wanted our corporate taxes to be in line with the those of United States. The Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers Association wanted the removal of nuisance taxes like the air conditioning tax. Auto industry representatives wanted reduced personal taxes so we could put more income in the hands of people and allow them to purchase consumer goods like cars. They asked for the elimination of the \$1.3 billion capital tax on innovation.

I encourage the minister to seriously look at this proposal and state today whether he supports it. It is not only the official opposition that has supported the idea. The present secretary of state for science and technology put the idea in the finance committee report and made a specific recommendation. I applaud him for that. The government should follow up on the suggestion of its own members.

In terms of political considerations we must recognize above all that we not only want an open border. Industry representatives also brought up the issue of border security and ensuring that in the wake of September 11 the United States can feel confident in our perimeter measures. Some have suggested a North American security perimeter. Although this is something we should not completely endorse at this time, we should certainly look at it.

●(1120)

I hope I have put forth the Canadian Alliance view that we should look at the auto industry in general. We should look at what the government can do not by interfering specifically in the marketplace or with one plant but by creating the general economic environment needed to ensure we keep long lasting jobs in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of my colleague from the Canadian Alliance.

I do not know if the member is aware that GM is the only auto and auto parts manufacturer in Quebec and that thousands of direct and indirect jobs are at stake.

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I repeat, there is only one auto manufacturing plant in Quebec. The Prime Minister of Canada promised us jobs. What we want is not that jobs be created in that industry, but rather that thousands of direct and indirect jobs that are threatened be saved.

The minister should table an action plan and a timetable, a recovery plan. We know that the GM plant is supposed to shut down in the fall of 2002.

What does the Canadian Alliance, which is hoping to become the government one day, have to propose as a concrete and immediate measure to save GM, the only auto manufacturer in Quebec, and to save thousands of jobs?

[*English*]

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question and I am aware that it is the only auto plant in Quebec. I mentioned that in my speech.

I share the frustrations of the hon. member at having his plant close. However what does the Bloc propose? The only thing I heard in response to my question was that the Minister of Industry would go to Detroit. He would go there to do what? Would he ask GM if it wanted to close the plant? What would that do? I do not understand how that is a substantive request.

The Canadian Alliance has suggested substantive policies to create the general economic climate to keep jobs in Canada. We have suggested reducing corporate and personal income taxes and eliminating the \$1.3 billion capital tax. Like the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers Association, we have suggested removing nuisance taxes that affect the industry like the air conditioning tax. These are substantive suggestions to ensure we can keep jobs in Canada.

Besides proposing meetings, do the Bloc members have specific suggestions for keeping the plant from closing and helping the auto industry in general in Canada?

• (1125)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the previous speaker for his thoughts. However in terms of real ideas there was only one theme coming from the Alliance member: tax cuts. If one had a toothache the Canadian Alliance would probably recommend a tax cut to cure it.

Does the hon. member agree that there are specific active measures the government could take if it was truly committed to the health and well-being of the auto industry in Canada? Does he agree that the auto industry should get the same kind of interest the aerospace industry gets in terms of the Technology Partnerships Canada or TPC loans which flow so freely to all things to do with the aerospace industry?

I know the hon. member will call it corporate welfare, but when the money is available and the Minister of Industry has it in his power to sprinkle industries with largesse, would he not take the auto industry as seriously and recommend a \$500 million per year intervention by Technology Partnerships Canada?

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my hon. friend because it allows me to clarify something.

In my speech I noted the record of TPC grants in Canada. Pratt & Whitney Canada received \$154 million from TPC on June 22, 1999.

On August 24, 1999, less than two months later, it issued a press release announcing cuts to 300 jobs in Canada and a further 400 jobs at unspecified locations worldwide. TPC grants, which are corporate welfare, do not protect jobs in the long term. That is a fact. Let us look at de Havilland. In 1997 TPC invested \$57 million in de Havilland. It then decided to lay off 450 employees in Downsview, Ontario.

If I believed corporate welfare was the way to protect jobs I would be the first to stand in here and ask for it. However it is not. The way to protect jobs in the long term is through tax reductions and being competitive on a global scale. That is why we in the Canadian Alliance continue to call for tax reductions. As long as taxes are too high in Canada, which under the present Liberal government they will be for a long time, we will continue to call for corporate rate reductions, the removal of nuisance taxes, and personal income tax reductions. We will specifically call for the elimination of the capital tax which discourages investment and in the long run causes plant closings in areas like Boisbriand, Quebec.

Our policy of low taxes and low public debt is the way to go if we want to have long term jobs in Canada.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my hon. colleague. He has hit the nub of the issue which is the entire economic climate.

As my hon. colleague mentioned, the governor of the Bank of Canada appeared before the finance committee yesterday. The governor indicated the slight increase in interest rates was of concern to some but would not adversely affect consumer demand for products. He said there were few levers the Bank of Canada could use but that it was focusing on interest rates and inflation.

My hon. colleague talked about levers of power. Does he see the government as having more levers to affect the economy? He touched on some of them. One he did not touch on is our high debt. Canada has over \$500 billion of debt, an amount that has increased under the Liberal government. Could my hon. colleague address how that might affect the environment we are talking about?

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, as a young Canadian one of the primary reasons I became involved in politics was our high public debt and what it was doing to investment in Canada.

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The theme was repeated over and over when industry associations appeared before the industry committee following September 11. They all said the government should continue to pay down the debt. They expressed concern about the government's spending habits during the year and said it was not paying down the debt. They were disappointed that no debt payments were included in the last budget. Large public debt scares away investment, and investment is what creates jobs in the long term.

I thank my hon. friend for his question because it hits on one of the main factors affecting investment, long term economic growth and long term high paying jobs. The government should not only reduce taxes. It should reduce the public debt as quickly and as much as possible.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Asselin: Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Alliance just talked about tax cuts with regard to this particular issue involving GM. For the government to cut taxes, people have to pay taxes. To pay taxes, people must work. If people do not work, they will not pay taxes. The federal government will have to pay employment insurance benefits to these people who, one day, will end up on welfare.

The problem is real. We do not want to know how to put caramel in a Caramilk bar. The problem is real, and it is urgent.

What solution does the Canadian Alliance want to propose to us today to let the Minister of Industry know that the federal government must act immediately? Opposition parties must band together and tell the federal government that it is not doing its job on this issue.

[*English*]

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I join with other opposition members in saying the government is not doing its job. However it is important to distinguish between how the government is not doing its job and how it should be doing its job.

I have made more practical suggestions for ensuring the auto industry survives in Canada than any Bloc member I have heard thus far. I have not heard specific suggestions from any Bloc member other than that the minister should go to Detroit and have a discussion. What do the Bloc members propose? What do they think the minister should offer the head of GM other than a general discussion? If Bloc members want to introduce a motion like this it is incumbent on them to have specific suggestions.

In terms of having people who can pay taxes, let us look at how we create jobs in Canada. We create jobs in Canada by having an economic climate in which people are willing to take risks to start up businesses. Once people start a business they will hire people.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak to the issue today.

[*Translation*]

I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

[*English*]

I actually had the opportunity a few years ago to go through the GM plant at Boisbriand. The thing that stood out was the size of the plant. It was huge. It had many more workers at one time than it has now because production was higher. I was told, although I only saw part of it while I was there, that the plant was in the incremental stages of closing down. It had this huge space but no workers and no production. It was absolutely bare space and in most cases was cordoned off.

The plant is a microcosm image of the auto production that is going on in Canada at the present time and has been going on in a declining way for at least a decade.

The government has been sitting back and accepting some realities in its mind only. It has been unwilling to recognize what is happening to the auto industry in Canada. It is in absolute denial.

Before the previous minister of industry resigned, he met and the current Minister of Industry has met with both the industry and the Canadian Auto Workers.

What we have been hearing is much of what we heard from the Alliance and that is that there are not really any problems, that it is just the adjustment within the marketplace and that we should let the markets control everything.

The government has the figures in its department and it is ignoring them. I will give a figure that was thrown out in the course of one of the meetings. We had at one time production in the country of two vehicles for every one that was sold in the country. That department and those ministers believe that is still the case. The reality is that this year we will be down to 1.6 vehicles produced in this country for every one sold. At the rate we are going, within two years we will be at 1.4. By the end of the decade, we will be below one produced for one sold. That is the reality with which we are dealing.

The GM plant in Boisbriand is just a reflection of the gradual decline. We stick our heads in the sand and do not pay any attention to it because we believe the auto industry is still healthy and vibrant in Canada. The government is dead wrong.

The auto industry in the country will soon be dead. I say that advisedly. If we look at what is happening with production in the southern U.S. and in Mexico, they are at this point our major competitors for production and jobs, the high paid jobs to which the Alliance members referred. They are on an exactly opposite growth pattern to what is going on in Canada. As we decline, the production and jobs will go to the southern U.S. and Mexico. Mexico will pass us in terms of production within the next four to five years as patterns go now.

Our industry is in serious trouble. I want to use an example and address it to the Alliance members as they talk about lowering taxes, letting the marketplace decide and not letting the government intervene. The Alliance says that is absolutely the last thing we should do.

Supply

● (1135)

I want to give a case study of the Hyundai plant that was built in Bromont, Quebec. It opened and then closed very early on. Hyundai is now coming back into North America.

Mr. Pat Martin: Where?

Mr. Joe Comartin: My friend from Winnipeg Centre asks where. That is a good question. It is not in Canada. The company did not even consider Canada. It went to Alabama because the state of Alabama, in a variety of ways, gave it subsidies amounting to \$375 million Canadian. According to the Alliance, that is letting the marketplace function.

Let me give another example that is closer to my home in Windsor. This one drives me crazy. It is the production of a new vehicle that is being considered at the present time by Daimler-Chrysler. Rumours have been floating around, and some were in the papers last week, which turned out to be false actually, that Windsor was perhaps being considered. The rumours are false because the state of Florida, which has almost no significant production, either in parts or an assembly plant, is throwing subsidy figures out to DaimlerChrysler in the amount of \$400 million to put the plant there. That is what we are competing against. That is the reality of the marketplace as we know it now. It is not a standoff issue or a let it go by itself. It is states in the U.S. putting up those types of dollars. That is \$400 million Canadian for that plant. Does anyone know how much it will cost in capital dollars to establish the plant? It will cost \$500 million Canadian. That is what it would cost if we put it into Windsor. Florida will contribute 80% of that in various subsidies.

We have this image that the trade agreements and the WTO will protect us from that kind of activity by government. It is a joke. The trade agreements, NAFTA, FTA, WTO, that structure that we built, allow corporations to take those kinds of subsidies. We in our naivete and I will even say stupidity have allowed that to go on without even trying to get into the ballpark. We are not there.

We hear things from the Alliance, which the government accepts, that we should stay out of it and let the marketplace control it, but that is the marketplace, which is governments in other jurisdictions subsidizing assembly plants and auto parts plants in their jurisdiction. However what we hear from that party and from the government is that they cannot do that. There is no state intervention allowed at all.

I want to go back again to my own community. We have a DaimlerChrysler plant in my community which has built large vans for over 20 years. The market has shifted and there is not enough demand for those vehicles any more. At one time the plant employed almost 3,000 highly paid, highly productive workers but it is now in serious trouble and will be closing at the end of this year.

The government must begin to develop, as has been recommended in a number of ways by the auto workers. We have been hearing some suggestions from the the auto companies which I do not accept. If the government does not move, that plant will go down and at least two others in Canada are at serious risk.

● (1140)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Windsor—St. Clair for a very knowledgeable speech. I know he lives with the reality of the downturn in the auto industry representing the area of Windsor.

He raised some very specific points, steps the government could take if it truly valued the auto industry as much as it claims. One of the things the hon. member mentioned had a dollar value or cost factor to it. He talked about the right to work states, the anti-union and non-union states in the deep south of the U.S. where a state like Alabama is offering a \$400 million subsidy for a \$500 million plant and wonders if we can play that kind of a game.

Would the hon. member agree that at least some intervention, as a gesture of how serious this downturn is, could come from the enormous surplus that the government has built up in the EI fund? I do not think there is a direct connection but I would point out that the EI fund is showing a surplus of \$750 million per month. Every month workers' money and business money goes into that surplus fund. In a context like that would the hon. member agree that \$400 million to create all those jobs may not be such a bad bargain?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I will address this in two ways and perhaps answer one of the Alliance questions of wanting to hear some specific proposals. One proposal would be to use the surplus in the EI fund. The government could be doing some things with the EI fund in terms of timesharing or extending benefits. If the plant in Boisbriand goes down, those workers will need that kind of assistance, as will my constituents in Windsor if the large van plant goes down.

There are precedents for this. We just dealt with it this past fall after the September 11 crisis in the aerospace industry, specifically around airport and airline workers. A significant arrangement was made at that time with timesharing going on within that industry. We have given a specific proposal but the government has to come to the table.

I want to be very critical of the government because it does not see the crisis.

I want to make another point around the whole issue of subsidies. If the government wants to do something then it should get back to the bargaining table with regard to NAFTA and the regulations under the WTO. It must begin talking about the reality of industry being subsidized by low wage states and low wage countries. That is a very clear subsidy.

The workers in my area and the workers at Boisbriand, with benefits and the rest of it, are being paid anywhere from \$25 to \$30 an hour. What are they competing against? What is Mexico in particular paying its workers? It is paying \$2 to \$4 an hour. Think of that magnitude of cost. That is a subsidy because of regulations in Mexico.

We have a similar type of provision, larger dollars, but a similar provision in the so-called right to work states. What are they being paid? It is anywhere from 25% to 50% of what a worker in my constituency is being paid. Another specific proposal is to go back to the table and tell the NAFTA people that those subsidies are no longer acceptable. The government should start talking in those types of terms.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for Windsor—St. Clair for splitting his time with me in this debate on the Bloc motion. I would also like to thank the Bloc Quebecois for the motion it has put to the House today. That motion brings about a debate on the situation of auto workers at the Boisbriand plant.

It is sad to be speaking in this House about the lack of leadership shown by the federal government on the issue of the workers at the General Motors plant in Boisbriand.

During the 1990s, Canada has become a world leader in the sector of final vehicle assembly and production of auto parts. That success led to the creation of over 35,000 jobs in the Canadian auto industry.

In 1999, Canada had made a record number of 3.1 million new vehicles with a trade surplus of \$28 billion. Those good years will soon be gone at the end of this year. From then on the situation of the Canadian auto industry has steadily worsened, with the resulting layoff next September of over 1,400 employees at the GM plant in Boisbriand, Quebec.

It is to deal specifically with these layoffs that I am rising today. We are talking about 1,400 jobs in the auto industry. It may be said that each full time job in Canada allows for the creation of three more jobs elsewhere in the community, \$25 to \$30 an hour jobs, and even more with overtime. These are important jobs for Canadians and for Quebecers.

That the federal government takes no leadership on this issue is unacceptable. But where is our government right now? Certainly not on this earth!

We have not heard from the federal government during that period. When my colleagues would regularly rise in the House of Commons, asking the government to take action to help these thousands of workers, the government would repeat the same story over and over, saying that Canada's economic fundamentals are positive and the industry will recover.

It is not with an optimistic government that this industry will recover. I call this a head in the sand approach, a want to hear and see nothing approach. This is exactly what this government is doing.

It cannot govern the country while having its head in the sand. Whether such a situation is happening in Newfoundland, Ontario or Nunavut, this government should to respond for the citizens' welfare. It did not do so in this case.

The industry minister at the time had much bigger fish to fry to achieve his own political goals. That did not lead him very far either, because he is no longer with us today.

Supply

We talk about free trade. We know that free trade did not help in this case. It is for all these reasons that the NDP has always opposed free trade. The outflow of new North-American automobile investments to the South has weakened our auto industry.

When the free trade agreement was adopted, Electrolux had been established in Quebec for years. Since then, the company has moved to the United States. We have lost many other industries and I could give name. I had visited an area in southern Ontario where there were many factories. As soon as the FTA was signed, they all moved south. That is where the jobs went. Instead of an agreement ensuring fair trade, this agreement forces us to compete with the Americans or the Mexicans for jobs, benefits and wages.

• (1150)

How can we compete with countries paying their employees \$2 or \$3 an hour? How can we compete with such countries? That is free trade, the type that benefits other countries.

Let us not forget that free trade was supposed to help raise the standard of living in Canada, not lower it. This is what free trade was supposed to do. This was the sales pitch of the government in office at the time and the opposition parties supportive of free trade.

Today, the Canadian Alliance says "No, let's cut taxes, let's cut taxes for big companies in order to create jobs". I do not agree with that. Free trade killed the auto pact that gave work to Canadians and Quebecers.

However, in 1992 and 1993, as in 1988 and 1989, when the Liberals were in opposition, they were against free trade. Today, they are sticking their heads in the sand and refusing to face the problems that they have created for this country.

Whether in Quebec, in Windsor or in Oshawa, the auto industry is very important in this country, and we have let it down. The Liberals should be ashamed of themselves today. How can they stand in the House of Commons and defend this cause?

My suggestion to the Prime Minister of Canada would be to plan a mission to Detroit to meet with GM officials. Let him take his responsibilities once and for all for the good of Canadians. He has done so in quite a while, I would say. He has forgotten Canadians. He has forgotten his own people.

I have nothing against his missions to Africa or elsewhere, but he must not forget Canada. There are Canadian interests here as well. Hopefully, he has a little place in his heart, somewhere to the left, for Canadian workers and he will to something for their jobs and for their families, which are facing difficult times.

Supply

I come from a region with a 20% unemployment rate. In six or seven years, the Brunswick mine will shut down and people will suffer. What will the federal government do to help these people get organized and prepare for other work, so that their families will not suffer? Where was the federal government when mines shut down in Cape Breton? Like the proverbial ostrich, it buried its head in the sand, and let the families suffer.

In Boisbriand, Quebec, this is exactly what the federal government is doing. The federal government and the provincial governments of Quebec and Ontario should meet with GM to try and find solutions to save these jobs, and to bring back our jobs. We have courageous people, people willing to work, people who are not lazy, who are no slouch and who wish to earn a living, to be able to feed their families and pay for the education of their children.

Today, they are boasting about creating jobs left and right, which are paying minimum wage. But this they do not boast about. They do not wish to talk about such things. I find unacceptable that they should talk about creating thousands of jobs when we are losing jobs paying \$25 and \$30 an hour.

I hope that the Premier Minister will hear about this, that he will be moved and that he will work for the good of all Canadians. That is my hope. It can happen.

When the government focuses on resolving regional problems, it can do it. It has to assume its responsibilities. It is important that this be done not only in Quebec, but in regions like New Brunswick and the Gaspé, where people suffer every day from the lack of jobs.

I hope there will be a mission in Canada, to get in touch with this country again and see the hardship caused by the cuts made everywhere, see those who are suffering and see to it that there is real job creation in rural areas of our beloved country, Canada.

• (1155)

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I want to congratulate the member for Acadie—Bathurst, as well as the previous speaker with whom he shared his time. They gave two excellent speeches that showed that people are not only concerned about the auto industry, but also about employment.

We are talking here about auto workers who are paid hourly wages. Should the Boisbriand plant shut down, 1,400 direct jobs would be affected, as well as many indirect jobs. It is inconceivable that this could happen in Quebec, where we produce electricity, where we produce aluminum, the metal of the future, and where we have highly skilled auto workers.

It is also unacceptable to see all the jobs that are being lost in the auto industry in our ridings. Ford dealerships—even though Ford builds its vehicles in Ontario, it is still in Canada—have difficulty expanding. Chrysler dealerships are also experiencing the same problems with regard to expansion, even though the situation seems to be getting better. And then there is GM. A few GM dealerships have had to close down in my riding.

During the same period, Toyota dealerships have been expanding. We see new Honda dealerships opening their doors or existing ones expanding. And there is also Volkswagen and Hyundai. We have to wonder whether the manufacturers of these imported vehicles are

supported by other governments while our government is sitting idly by. It is doing nothing about softwood lumber issue and about the auto industry. Meanwhile, the popularity of the Liberal government is on the rise, as is the unemployment rate.

I would like to hear what the member for Acadie—Bathurst has to say about that.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. As he pointed out, other corporations feel they have a place here, in Canada.

Let us hope that GM, Ford or Chrysler decide to be more proactive and assume their responsibilities. Whether it be GM, Ford or Chrysler, these big companies have done business here in Canada and raked in billions of dollars. Why are they now letting the people of Canada down after making all this money? They also have a social responsibility.

This is a disgrace. To make a few bucks more, they are moving to the southern parts of North America. Why are they not staying in Canada to help the people here. They could provide jobs and benefit from our skilled workers, who are good people and potential buyers. As I said earlier, these are hard working people who do a good job of manufacturing world class cars. Why will these companies not act responsibly in this regard?

Here is how I would respond to my colleague. If Toyoto, Honda and all those other companies see Canada as a land of opportunity, why are the companies already doing business here deciding to move away? I do hope that these companies will agree to play a social role in Canada and come back here, so we can keep these jobs, instead of letting us down just to be able to make a few more bucks elsewhere.

Money is important, but so are people. It is also important to enjoy life. We should stop thinking only about money in the bank. We should try to see the more human side of things, to help the people with whom we share this great country.

• (1200)

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will keep it short so that my colleague has time to answer. I congratulate him on his remarks. Even though we do not always agree, we do share the same respect for workers. Here is my question.

Does he not think that 1,400 well paid jobs, including management positions with big salaries, represent an even higher social cost if these people end up unemployed, with no future left? Is the social cost not higher than if we had the courage to go down there to settle the problem with GM once and for all?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague started by saying there are things we do not agree on.

Supply

Let me tell her we agree 99% of the time. There is one thing we clearly disagree on, and we will not delve into that today. Now is not the time.

I agree with my colleague. What is at issue here is not only 1,400 jobs at \$25 or \$30 an hour, but also three times that number of jobs in the community. There are other manufacturers, machine shops and all sorts of jobs that flow from the auto industry, in restaurants, stores, and so on. There are more than 1,400 jobs at stake. That is why the government, instead of turning these workers into EI or welfare recipients, should go down in Detroit and talk to GM to find a solution.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise and talk about this issue today because I have a history in the automotive business. That is how I earned my living for years. In fact I sold the Pontiac Firebirds produced in this factory from my own car dealership in Amherst, Nova Scotia, for several years.

I was interested while listening to the previous speaker and made a note that in my career as a car dealer I have sold Ford, General Motors and Fiat cars. My brother, who lives in Moncton and happens to be in town today, now sells Toyotas and Nissans and used to sell Mazdas. My other brother sold Honda motorcycles and my father sold Fords, Chryslers, Renaults, Volkswagens, Rolls-Royce, American Motors, Fiats, Peugeots, British Leyland, Jaguar and probably some others I have forgotten. I come from a long line of car dealers and our family is certainly steeped in the industry.

Today's motion raises an issue that is bigger than the car business or even the workers. It is the communities in Canada that will suffer because of federal government policies that help cause such things to happen. It is a big concern for me, especially since the last census came out and showed that there is an incredible migration from smaller communities to bigger communities, in fact to four specific communities: Montreal, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver.

When a plant like this closes the community really hurts. It affects everyone in the community. It affects small businesses. It affects the ability to maintain schools because the number of schoolchildren declines. When a large plant like this closes, it affects the ability to maintain health care and everything else. It has happened in my own riding several times. An international company closes a plant and leaves the community high and dry. The problem is that in the plant the workers quite often make \$15, \$25 or even \$30 an hour and after the closing the replacement jobs pay perhaps \$8 or \$9 an hour.

In my province of Nova Scotia the amazing thing is that we often provide millions of dollars in incentives to bring in a call centre to replace a factory that we perhaps could have kept with a bit of effort. That effort is what should happen here. There should be some help to maintain this plant and make sure that it remains. It is a productive plant and it has built and builds a quality product. It is an international factory with internationally high standards.

Again, this issue really brings out the lack of long range thinking by the government in defending rural Canada as far as economic development goes and as far as other areas are concerned.

The last speaker from Acadie—Bathurst was very passionate in his speech. I looked up the last census. His riding has lost 5.3% of its population from 1996 to 2001. It is almost impossible to run a business when there is a population decline like that. It is very difficult for communities and municipalities to maintain infrastructure, schools and hospitals when there is such a decline.

What is amazing is that the province of Newfoundland has had an overall decline in population of 7%. Every single federal riding in Newfoundland has lost population, with declines in population as high as 12.1% in Burin—St. George's. The government is doing nothing to stop this incredible flow of people from the smaller communities to the major centres. If it does not do something there will be a huge price to pay, because eventually the transfer payments that some provinces do not like to make now will have to be a lot bigger.

The fact of the matter is that the people who are transferring around this country are usually younger people looking for opportunities when opportunities do not exist in areas of high unemployment. It is the young people, our future, who move from these communities to the major centres with big populations, like Montreal, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver.

The issue with this car plant in Quebec is just the tip of the iceberg as far as what is happening in the country is concerned and the government is doing nothing about it. The members on the other side are doing nothing about this. They are sitting there and allowing this to happen. There is no action.

● (1205)

The economic development programs have pretty much declined and disappeared. There are no clear economic development programs. There is no commitment to small communities. There is no commitment to economic development. There is no commitment to immigration, to an immigration policy that will provide immigration for all sectors of the country. There is no leadership on the government side. We will all pay a big price. The provinces that do not like making transfer payments now will be shocked when they see what happens in the future as our young people move away. These are the young people who would start small businesses. These are the young people who would end up hiring other people. These are the people who would buy houses and pay taxes. In many circumstances, they are gone now. That is what will happen in this city in Quebec where the plant is closing. People will leave and it will be very difficult for the community to maintain its significant position.

Again, in Nova Scotia, my home province, where we have had a significant decline in population in certain areas, within Nova Scotia the population drift is to the centre, Halifax, or the area around Halifax. The population in the riding of Bras d'Or—Cape Breton is down 7.6%. Young people are moving away to other areas, maybe Halifax, maybe Toronto or maybe Calgary. A lot of young people will not be there to maintain those communities in the future. They will not be there to build the houses, to pay the taxes, to buy the cars and to help the corner store operate. It will mean closure upon closure.

Supply

As well, the population in the constituency of Sydney—Victoria is down 6.2%. We can compare that to Alberta, which has had a population increase of 10%. People do not understand the impact of that population transfer. Again, it is young people. It is the best, strongest, most efficient, capable, productive people, the people who would raise families and start businesses. They are moving away from rural Canada and small communities to the major centres. These people are assets, huge assets, who are moving from small communities to major centres. It is a very scary situation.

In New Brunswick, only the centres around Fredericton and Moncton have not had a decrease in population. The rest are either very stagnant or the populations have decreased. Again, this is caused by a lack of economic development programs, a lack of any kind of a plan at all to help save a plant like the General Motors plant in Quebec that is about to close. The price will be enormous when that plant closes.

If the government is asked to intervene at the end of this process to try to provide some help, it will probably pour in \$1 million or \$2 million and try to get a call centre or something like that and replace the jobs with fewer jobs at half the wages. It is totally because of a lack of leadership by the Liberal government. It has allowed the economic development programs that were established over the years to dwindle, to be diluted and diminished and used for all kinds of other purposes, political and otherwise.

We certainly feel for the people in this community. It is not just the workers who will suffer. The entire community will suffer. I have seen this happen with my own eyes. The community will suffer. Small businesses in the area will suffer. The schools, the hospitals, the municipalities and everybody will have a hard time making ends meet when the plant closes because of the lack of that payroll going into the community and because of all of the other peripheral businesses that result from it.

I urge the government to rethink this whole thing, to look at the census that just came out which shows this incredible migration of young people to the major centres of our country and the major centres within our provinces. If we do not address this incredible migration, which is about economic opportunities, the young people cannot stay. If there are no economic opportunities, they will move. That is what we are talking about with this General Motors plant closing in Quebec. If those opportunities go, the young people will go with them.

I urge the government to rethink the whole issue of economic development and rethink the issue of how the migration of population will impact us as a country, us in the House, us as federal government. I urge the government to try to develop some innovative, imaginative, leadership thinking that will reduce the migration and keep the younger people in the small communities. Otherwise we will lose these small communities. They will dwindle and diminish and will not be able to survive.

● (1210)

The Deputy Speaker: Before I ask for questions or comments, I would like some clarification from the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester as to if in fact he was sharing his time with a colleague.

Mr. Bill Casey: No, I was not, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I really welcome this debate. I am glad to see that everybody is interested in this matter and recognizes that the government has to get down to work and is not doing so.

As I said previously, the Boisbriand area has already had to deal with the problem of Mirabel. This has affected us tremendously. Lots of people lost their jobs and the small neighbouring municipalities have had unbelievable financial problems. Mirabel was an important source of jobs, of well paying jobs. We have lost all that.

The Quebec government decided to create a duty free zone. However, this does not do much to solve the problem of an airport which is there but which is not being used, because the federal government made a mistake and decided to pass this hot potato on to the Quebec government.

We have a similar problem with Boisbriand. The Prime Minister has to accept to meet the people at GM and to sit down with them. As Prime minister, he has the power to negotiate something with the existing coalition and to submit the results to the corporation.

I would like my colleague to tell us if he agrees with that. Does he agree that the Prime Minister should, for once, take a firm stand and go to Detroit to meet with GM officials?

[English]

Mr. Bill Casey: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I certainly do think the Prime Minister should step in here. This is so important. It involves so many jobs. It will have such a huge impact on the community.

In all fairness, in my experience with this sort of thing, and I have experienced four or five significant plant closings in my own riding although none as big as this one, the only thing that works is a partnership effort from the municipality, the province and the federal government. They must make every single effort. If that plant closes, the jobs will never be replaced. They can never replace those jobs. Certainly I would recommend that the municipality and the provincial and federal governments just dig in their heels and say that they will not let that plant close, that they will do whatever it takes and work together as a partnership to defeat that decision.

● (1215)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly share the concerns of my colleague from Cumberland—Colchester. The fact is that there is a movement of young people from rural Canada into the urban centres. In Bras d'Or—Cape Breton we have certainly lost our share of young people.

Supply

Where I differ with my hon. colleague is that I see merit in some of the initiatives in recent years. We have been successful in some initiatives. In the last two years we have shown great growth in the Cape Breton area. We have been able to develop 4,000 new jobs. We have leveraged \$300 million in corporate private investment. The unemployment rate has dropped from around 20% to just below 15% in the industrial Cape Breton area. There have been some positive things happening.

I do not share his pessimistic view about call centres. We see young people staying in the communities now, securing employment at the call centres at around \$10 an hour but with health and dental benefits. Therefore I would ask my hon. colleague, does he not think that the call centres are making a contribution to local economies?

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do think that call centres play a key role in the local economy, but \$10 an hour jobs do not replace jobs at \$25 an hour. That is my point. If there is nothing else, call centres certainly do provide entry level jobs and good experience in the workplace for many people. They are a very valuable asset.

However, according to the last census, the member's riding lost 7.6% of its population. I do not think he can paint too bright a picture if it has lost 7.6% of its population. Maybe it has turned around in the last little while, but that is what is shown by the census that came out two or three weeks ago. This means that to hold its own a business in that riding has to really struggle compared to a business in Alberta, which has had a 10% increase in population. It does not have to do hardly anything right and it can increase its business. In that member's riding, with the population declining by 7.6%, a business has to increase its market share and cut expenses just to hold its own.

It is the same challenge for the municipal governments, the school boards and the health boards. I will bet that most of that 7.6% decline in population is young people. That means less people for the schools, which means less schools, less teachers and a smaller variety of teaching ability so, in effect, a poorer level of education than if those people would have stayed. Therefore, it is a crisis.

I do believe that it is a crisis. I hope every member will just look at the census to see what is happening in the country and try to influence the government to address the issue. It is a critical issue.

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Mr. Speaker, one point I want to make is that union officials have told us and stressed the incredible level of productivity at that plant in Quebec. The quality is A-1 and good in terms of labour relations and so on. The point that I was making earlier is that there are other reasons why these sorts of things happen. I know the member touched on them, as have many members.

One thing I want to mention is the political instability of Quebec. Obviously the sense of separation from this country of ours, where we are part of the free trade agreement, creates huge benefits in the province of Quebec.

I think it is important for Premier Landry to go to Detroit, talk to the chief executive officers of Ford, General Motors and Daimler-Chrysler, and explain what is going on in Quebec and give them a degree of comfort to continue employment in that province and in this country.

I sincerely believe there is a connection between what is going on with the separatists in Quebec and the decision by corporate giants to move out of that province. We have seen an evacuation from that province of many international companies. That is the reality and I am hoping the hon. member would address that.

• (1220)

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, first, the very distinguished member who spoke before me from New Brunswick Southwest has suggested that the quality in this factory is excellent, and it is. I sold those cars. When I was a Pontiac dealer we could not get enough. We would order 12 and maybe, if we were really lucky, we would get one, which just shows how the market has changed.

As to the question raised by the member up about political stability, no one, no business, no investor wants to invest in an area where there is political instability. If there is any question about political instability, investment goes somewhere else. It is really simple. If there is political instability in Quebec, and I am not qualified enough to know if there is political instability or not, money stays away.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before his last reply, I was prepared to congratulate the hon. member for his speech, particularly his openness to the Bloc Québécois proposal concerning this morning's motion. I am less thrilled about the response his colleague invites him to share in concerning stability.

I would like to remind hon. members of the Bombardier investments in Dublin, Ireland. This is not exactly a place one could describe as having the greatest political stability, yet its economy is growing at an amazing rate. This is now one of the leading countries in Europe as far as investments are concerned.

In the region of the hon. member, for whom I have the greatest respect, there is no problem of political instability, yet he himself reports there are economic problems. How, then, can he explain his colleague's question?

Despite the threatened loss of jobs at GM, this quarter saw Quebec in the lead in Canada as far as investments and job creation were concerned. In the hon. member's region, where there is no political instability, there are many problems. How can he explain this?

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. I do agree with the Bloc motion. I often agree with Bloc members when I think they are right. When I think they are wrong, I disagree with them. It is not complicated for me. I am absolutely sure that all I said was that if there is political instability in an area, investors do not want to invest there. It is not complicated.

Supply

We can look at the example in Ireland. When it effectively had a war, there was no investment. Bombardier did not go there and I know auto plants closed. I remember De Lorean went there to build cars, which looked something like the cars they were going to build in Quebec. Because there was that political instability, the factory failed and closed. Now there is political stability and it is prospering.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to speak on the famous matter of the GM plant located in the riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

Before I start, I would like to salute your son, who is doing such a great job these days for the Montreal Canadiens.

I will be splitting my time with my colleague for Joliette.

I truly cannot understand why GM is closing its Boisbriand plant. As my colleague has just said, it is acknowledged as one of the most efficient, if not the most efficient, of GM's 30 North American plants.

I would remind hon. members that 96% of the vehicles assembled at the Boisbriand plant go directly to dealerships, thanks to the quality of the work done by the Canadian auto workers in my region, the CAW members as I will refer to them from now on.

I wish to inform those who are listening that, as we speak, all the plant equipment is being labelled and will be shipped to other GM plants in North America.

As for the Boisbriand paint plant, it will be relocated to Mexico. Let us remember that it was funded equally by Quebecers and Canadians with a 30 year interest free \$220 million loan. The loan will come due in 2017. The former president of GM Canada told us at a press conference that she will repay these \$220 million in 2017.

What disturbs me the most is the laxness of the federal government toward this situation. Besides the loss of 1,400 direct jobs and 6,600 indirect jobs, all our region will be dramatically affected. With the loss of the auto industry in Quebec, it is young Quebecers who are highly qualified for a specialized job who will pay the price.

Speaking about paying the price, the closing of such a huge plant will lead to considerable social costs: personal bankruptcies, family breakdowns, domestic violence, depression that might even lead to suicide. People who worked at the Boisbriand plant and who lost their jobs have committed suicide. I personally know some of them.

For the last two years, CAW people have met federal ministers time and again but they always refused to hear their grievances.

As soon as the closing of the GM plant in Boisbriand was announced, the Liberal government's total lack of interest in the employees' cause was obvious. It was obvious at the press conference in Boisbriand, in the town council room where Bernard Landry, then finance minister, and the current deputy prime minister, who was then industry minister, were present.

• (1225)

The latter paid lip service to the issue, proposing vague federal programs that might be available to help out GM. Bernard Landry,

on the other hand, offered a detailed assistance plan by the government of Quebec to rescue the automotive industry in Quebec.

I think that this was the day the federal government decided to shut the file. As proof, I have all of the contacts made with Brian Tobin, which were not acted on.

Furthermore, labour representatives from the CAW in Boisbriand met with the former minister for Quebec, Mr. Gagliano, and with the minister for the regions at the time, who is now the Minister of Justice. The ministers were rather cavalier about the whole thing, saying "This is GM's decision, there is nothing we can do about it. It is not our problem". They were like Pontius Pilate; they washed their hands of the whole thing.

None of the federal ministers, including the current Minister of Industry, have done a thing about the GM Boisbriand matter, nor have any of the federal Liberal members from Quebec. Look through the papers. Let us ask ourselves the question. Why such a lack of action, such lack of interest on the part of the federal government? Why?

I am sure that the Prime Minister has positioned his government on this issue by saying "Ontario has the auto industry, Quebec has the aerospace industry". This is a quote from the Prime Minister.

If the Prime Minister wanted to be logical, Quebec would have 24% of the entire Canadian auto industry, not 5% as is now the case, because Ontario has 95% of the auto industry and 24% of the aerospace industry as well. If one wants to be logical, if Ontario has the auto industry and Quebec has the aerospace industry, let us give 24% of the auto industry to Quebec, because Ontario has 24% of the aerospace industry. Where is the logic?

It is completely unacceptable that Quebec has such a small share of the auto industry. If the federal government does not do something now, Quebec's share will drop to 0% in August, while Ontario's share will rise to 100%. That is fair!

Never in their efforts to keep the plant alive did GM trade unionists threaten any boycotting. They sat down with GM's directors to look for solutions to the problem. They travelled all around Quebec to make the public aware of the terrible economic impact closing the plant would have.

They also won the firm support of 600 towns and cities in Quebec, of over 60,000 petitioners and of over 1.7 million union members. During the next election, I am going to remind those 1.7 million union members what this government did.

• (1230)

It is perfectly clear to everybody that the auto industry is going to Ontario. The proof is simple. Union president Buzz Hargrove said "It is essential that the federal government develop a new auto industry policy for Canada, recognizing Ontario is central to any new policy".

In conclusion, the GM affair is proof to me that the federal government is robbing Quebec to benefit the other provinces. It is high time that Quebec became a sovereign nation.

Supply

Mr. Serge Marcil (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat surprised by the Bloc Quebecois' motion. This is an issue that has been debated for a long time in Quebec and in Canada, yet the Bloc Quebecois decided to bring it up for debate in the House as the plant is within months of shutting down its operations.

It seems to me that if the Bloc Quebecois were serious about this issue, this debate should have taken place a long time ago. There must surely be a reason behind this. In fact, the Bloc Quebecois' only argument is to claim that the Government of Canada did nothing about it.

Our government was the first one to organize meetings regarding this issue. We are funding a committee and we sit on it. We organized meetings with GM officials in Detroit. If there is an issue on which there is very close co-operation between the various levels of government, between the Quebec and federal governments, it is this one.

The debate got off on the right foot. But the more it goes, the more it seems like they want to create rivalry between Quebec and Ontario, instead of really looking at the fundamental problem in the automotive industry. Even the Quebec government offered over \$300 million to GM in 1999, but that offer was rejected. So, what GM is currently experiencing is not a money problem. It must be something other than a money problem.

The only solution that the Bloc Quebecois is proposing right now is for the Prime Minister to contact or meet the head of GM, which should resolve the matter. This is a rather serious issue. So many representations have been made by both levels of government that the Bloc Quebecois ought to be a little more objective in its comments.

• (1235)

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Mr. Speaker, I ask myself what I should reply. I believe that my colleague from Salaberry—

An hon. member: Beauharnois—Salaberry.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: —from Beauharnois—Salaberry must be from another planet. What he is saying is illogical. Let us recall how many times the auto workers have come to the Hill to protest. Let us recall how many times the auto workers have, over the years, come to see their federal MPs from Quebec, and gone from one minister's office to another. How many times has this happened?

I would like to remind my dear friend and colleague, the man from another planet, of the problem of PACCAR, Kenworth-PACCAR. This business closed down, but thanks to the good work of the federal government of the day and the good work of the Quebec government, and thanks to the efforts by the people of the region, PACCAR reopened its doors, and things are going very well for it. They have just done some more hiring, some job creation.

The government is talking of money. The Quebec government made an offer to GM of a \$360 million plan to help the company survive. The brilliant Deputy Prime Minister over there said "Well now, you know, I don't know about that". I was there when he gave his response at the Boisbriand city hall. My dear colleague said "Well now, we at the federal level surely have some programs that

could perhaps—" No one sat down with GM to offer a clear, cut and dried federal position on this.

The Minister of Justice went to Detroit. He came back to report, saying "It's all over, guys, GM at Boisbriand is a thing of the past". He threw in the towel. When did they go to Detroit with Mr. Gagliano? Two and a half years ago. I know all about this issue, I have lived it. I do not promise pie in the sky. In the issues I deal with, I do not promise what I cannot deliver. I am involved hands-on. Let them not come and—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Joliette.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak to the motion we moved regarding GM, I do so with mixed feelings.

On the one hand I am very proud to be able to be here to defend the interests of Quebec and GM workers, to defend a region of Quebec, something—as the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles mentioned—the federal Liberals from Quebec are not doing. Not one of them has stood to defend the GM workers.

So, on the one hand I am proud of this, yet I am also extremely sad to have to intervene on this feared closing. Remember, the GM plant has not yet closed. September 2002 is the date that is being mentioned.

Which explains the timeliness of today's debate. If there were a real mobilization of all of the elected representatives from Quebec, not only from the Bloc Quebecois, but also from the Liberal benches, who must stop playing petty politics, it seems to me that we would be able to find solutions and keep GM in Quebec.

The shame of the GM plant closing is that, unfortunately, this is a situation that has been repeated all too often in Quebec's past. This is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the failure of the federal government's industrial policy. When I say failure, I am referring to the situation in Quebec for the most part. Unfortunately, Ontario has received more than its share of federal development assistance, while Quebec has gotten the crumbs.

There is only one company, one auto parts assembly plant in Quebec, and that is the GM plant in Sainte-Thérèse, and we would like to keep it. We should have had more. Sadly we only have the one, and we want to keep it. If we lose it, it will not be because of the political uncertainty of Quebec, as someone mentioned. That has nothing to do with this issue. It is rather proof of the failure of the federal government's industrial policies.

Quebec has developed and continues to do so. However, a look at all of the issues together reveals that Quebec has developed despite the federal presence, and despite the restrictions of federal policies.

From an economic point of view, the situation at GM is somewhat similar to the Kyoto protocol at the environmental level. The Canadian government is dragging its feet to ratify the accord, while everyone in Quebec supports it.

Supply

From a social point of view, it is like with the Young Offenders Act. In Quebec, everyone agreed that we had to maintain this legislation, because it gives excellent results. But the rest of Canada wanted a more repressive measure. So, the federal government met the wishes of the rest of Canada by going against the needs of Quebec.

The situation is somewhat similar with the millennium scholarships, where the government artificially created a program even though Quebec has had a loans and scholarships program since the late sixties. The federal government jeopardized our own initiative for reasons of visibility.

All these examples reflect the same reality. Canada is being built, and this is perfectly legitimate, but in the process, Quebec's aspirations are being denied and our province is forced to fall into step. This is exactly what happened with GM. The same thing happened in the auto industry.

I could give a list—unfortunately I only have ten minutes—of all the federal policies which, over the past 100 years, have adversely affected Quebec's development. But we managed to develop nevertheless. However, if we had been sovereign, we would have fared much better than we did during these 100 years.

For example, the National Policy, at the end of the 19th century, cut us off from our southern markets by artificially creating an east-west Canadian market. Fortunately, things are being straightened up with the free trade agreement. We are now doing more business with the United States than with the rest of Canada and this will continue.

During the fifties, the St. Lawrence Seaway was built. This project definitely had to be implemented, but a whole series of Quebec industries were adversely affected by it. The federal government never gave one penny to restructure these industries and retrain workers to promote sound industrial development in Quebec. There were problems in the southwest and eastern parts of Montreal because the seaway was being built, but the federal government never provided any help.

Because of the Borden Line, for years we had to pay more for our oil than what we would have paid on international markets, this to subsidize western Canada's oil industry.

Since 1970, Trudeau's energy policy has led to direct investments of \$66 billion in the hydrocarbon industry and zero for hydroelectric development in Quebec.

As for research and development, we are aware of the imbalance in federal expenditures in that area. There are no research centres in Quebec. They are all located in Ontario.

We still managed to further our development thanks to our economic success, among other things. As for the knowledge economy, half of the jobs are in Quebec. And we did that despite the federal government's policies.

• (1240)

That is what the GM issue is all about. The federal government may have a chance to react and to make a concerted effort to find a solution that would prevent the plant from shutting down.

I remind members that this plant closure will cost 1,400 direct jobs, good jobs, as well as 9,000 indirect jobs. It will affect several regions in Quebec: the Beauce region, the Outaouais region, the Eastern Townships, southwest Montreal—southwest Montreal again. Small businesses that manufacture parts for GM may have to shut down. It is indeed a critical situation for thousands of families, for thousands of workers all over Quebec. It is a matter of survival, and we must find a solution.

The FTQ and the union have proposed solutions. What is needed is a new model. Last March, the company showed some openness, but it also takes some political will on Ottawa's part.

The CAW and the FTQ have made and are still making the necessary efforts. However, they have noticed that the federal government is dragging its feet. Maybe it thinks that the auto industry has no place in Quebec, that it belongs in Ontario, that it must be concentrated in Ontario. I often heard that. It is normal for that industry to be in Ontario, that is where the concentration is.

However, when it comes to industries operating in Quebec, they must be spread out all over the place. In the case of the pharmaceutical industry, for example, which is concentrated in the Montreal area, the federal government, with all its subsidies, is creating Canada-wide competition.

It is the same for the aerospace industry. In the case of the F-18 maintenance contract a few years back, we were told: "You have the space agency, this is going to Winnipeg".

When it comes to Quebec, the approach is piecemeal; when Ontario is involved, there is an industrially cohesive policy. That is how the federal government operates. It is not even a failure to act, as in the case of GM; it is bad faith.

I appeal to the Liberal members from Quebec: come with us. We are prepared to set aside party lines and sit down and find solutions with you, because what is at stake is the future of a region, the future of thousands of families in Quebec. I am sure that these members are concerned about the wellbeing of Quebecers. This is an opportunity for them to show it.

As the preceding speaker said, and as we all know, productivity is not a problem at GM. In Boisbriand, for instance, productivity went up 55.7% between 1989 and 1996, while for the GM group as a whole, it rose an average of 40.6%. Between 1997 and 2000, it went up by 14.5%, while for the GM group as a whole, it rose an average of 13.4%. Overall, this represents a 70% increase in productivity at the GM plant in Boisbriand, compared to 54% for the GM group in general.

Workers at this plant have made incredible efforts. I remember when Louis Laberge went to see them, before the paint plant was built. He told them: "If you want to keep the plant, you are going to have to roll up your sleeves". And the workers did; so did the Government of Quebec. Now it is up to the federal government to develop some backbone, forget about politics and get back on board.

Supply

For a number of years, I was the secretary general of the CSN. Since I have a couple of minutes left, I am going to tell a little story. Sometimes, issues as important as this are ridiculed by federal government ministers, whom I shall not name; if ever I am asked which ones, I will tell you.

I came here with Expro workers fighting for the survival of their company. The minister in question, whose help we sought to allow the company's conversion to less military operations said to me: "Mr. Paquette, why should I acquiesce to your demands? You are a separatist, and so are the union's leaders". This attitude is unacceptable. This happened in private but I can assure you that those workers did not forget it. I would not like to go through a similar situation with GM.

I believe we have an opportunity to find a solution together. We should all support the motion moved by the Bloc Québécois, namely the member for Laurentides. Also I think we should circulate the CAW's petition.

Personally, I believe that the sovereignty of Quebec remains the way to avoid the worst case scenario for GM.

•(1245)

[*English*]

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, a short while ago my hon. colleague was asked if he was from the same planet. I can assure hon. members I am from the same planet and the same country on the same continent.

I find it rather divisive when I hear members saying that the emphasis should be on the government to share an industry. I remind my colleagues in the Bloc that in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C., which have a great deal more population than Quebec, there is no automobile industry there. There was at one time, the plant is still there. Why are we talking about the responsibility of government to share an industry?

It is not the role of the federal government to say this should be put here, there or there. It has not in the past and if it does now I will be the first one over there to tell it what I want in Saskatchewan.

•(1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I believe there is a bit of confusion on the hon. member's planet.

Clearly, we are in a North American market when we talk about the east of Canada, including Quebec and Ontario, which allows for a relatively similar industrial development.

There is no objective reason why the auto industry did not develop in Quebec as it did in Ontario. Furthermore costs are cheaper and productivity is higher in Quebec. Over time federal policies and a number of other factors allowed Ontario to get the upper hand.

What we are asking is this: there is a vehicle assembly plant in Quebec and we want to keep it. We are also asking that when an industry develops in Quebec, the government avoid applying a piecemeal approach throughout Canada, but rather allow synergism to develop in regional markets in order to re-enforce them and make them more competitive in a global context.

It is the federal government's responsibility as well as that of provincial governments to deal with this issue, in the same way that we have to deal with the problems of western farmers, for whom I have much sympathy. I will not let them down. As long as we are a part of Canada we will not leave them out in the cold because they need our help to solve their problems.

In the same way, I expect that Westerners will not abandon the GM workers in Sainte-Thérèse and will support our motion.

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my hon. Liberal colleague for Beauharnois—Salaberry, not to name him, said a moment ago that nothing was done for the GM plant and that we were waiting until the last minute. I found that somewhat insulting.

We have been working on this issue for years. In our regions, in my region, many workers have been working for GM for years. We are concerned by this issue and we have been working on it for a long time. We are trying to find ways to solve the problem.

What is lacking now is the political will of the Liberal government. The Prime Minister of Canada should intervene. That is what is lacking now. That is the will we asking for. We are not asking for partisanship; we want to save this plant. It is not only this plant that we want to save, but the whole auto industry in Quebec. The GM plant was the only vehicle assembly plant left in Quebec, and now, the auto industry in Quebec is going to be totally wiped out.

I would like to hear from my colleague from Joliette who made a great speech.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Laurentides for her question.

I think she is pointing out something extremely important, that is the fact that we have only one vehicle assembly plant, which creates a many indirect jobs in the subcontracting sector.

True, GM has committed itself to increase its subcontracting and is closing its plant in Sainte-Thérèse. However, if that plant closes, we will lose expertise. In the end, these businesses will also close, because there will be no vehicle assembly plant left in Quebec.

An investment decision that was supposed to be made in Quebec has already been transferred in Ontario, as a result the announced closing of the GM plant. Consequently, it is crucial to keep the plant open and to have the political determination to do so.

The former secretary of state responsible for regional economic development came back from Detroit and said "I do not see which Canadian program could be used for that purpose". Generally speaking, the Liberals have more than enough imagination when it comes to helping certain friends. Consequently, they should also be able to do some creative thinking in this case. I hope the new secretary of state will be more creative than the previous one.

Supply

To conclude, I want to state that, for the sake of the auto industry not only in Quebec but in all of Canada, the GM plant in Sainte-Thérèse must stay open. We are well aware that the industry in Canada is threatened by the developing industry in Mexico and that we are not investing enough in research and development. Sainte-Thérèse could be the opportunity to mobilize to keep the auto industry in Quebec and in Canada.

Mr. Serge Marcil (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to speak about this unfortunate issue. It also happens to be a priority for members on this side. A great deal of efforts have been made. It is always sad to think about the potential closure of a plant and the resulting loss of jobs, because in the end the families pay the price.

However, I take issue with this opposition motion blaming the government for its lack of action in this file when we know that the Government of Canada has been involved in a concrete way on a daily basis, sitting on the committee, offering funding, setting up meetings and working very closely with the Quebec government on this issue. In view of all the efforts that have been made for several months, I wonder why the opposition would choose to put forward such a motion today.

For several years now, the Government of Canada has been working on this issue with the industry. Even the ministers have taken part in this debate, meeting, visiting and exchanging with people at GM Canada.

Despite all the suggestions by the various stakeholders concerning alternate uses for the plant—plans were developed, proposals were presented, including assembling specialized vehicles, refurbishing and other activities linked to the auto industry—GM does not seem to be interested in any of these solutions. The government of Quebec even went as far as offering over \$300 million, which GM turned down. So this has nothing to do with money; it probably has to do with the worldwide restructuring of the auto industry.

The GM corporation has decided and announced publicly that it would close its plants in September 2002. We do not like this decision. Personally I do not like it. As a government member, I can say that not one of my colleagues in this House accepts this decision by General Motors. We believe it is a business decision.

We are fully aware that the government has done everything it could to keep the plant open, and the story does not end here. Other efforts are being made in this respect.

We are also fully aware that some things cannot be controlled and are beyond the control of even the Government of Canada. This happens to be one of them.

I am not saying this in a flippant way. General Motors has decided to close the plant, and it seems that it will close. This is unfortunate, and it has a huge negative impact on a region, but it does not mean the end for the auto industry in Quebec or its vehicle assembly sector. Far from it. There are in fact many encouraging aspects in the auto industry in Quebec.

For example, in the last few months, several announcements were made to the effect that the auto industry is still viable in Quebec. I think we can all feel encouraged by the announcements made recently by the Saargummi group, the Société de développement du

magnésium and Bridgestone-Firestone Inc., which are expecting to make new investments of more than \$100 million in the auto industry in Quebec.

Of course, these may not be major investments when compared to this huge General Motors plant in Boisbriand. However, these investment decisions made by the businesses that I just mentioned still clearly reflect the world class quality, international competitiveness and potential of the auto industry in Quebec.

Thus, contrary to what the opposition would have us believe, the auto industry in Quebec is not about to disappear, not now or in the near future.

As for the Government of Canada, it will continue to do everything possible to promote the growth of the auto industry and to attract new investments in Quebec.

● (1255)

The Government of Canada is also working very hard to attract new investment for the auto industry all over our country.

In both Quebec and Ontario, the Government of Canada is consulting with the provincial government, the industry and the unions, working together to find ways to address the issues that have an impact on future investment, production and innovation in the auto industry.

Even after General Motors had announced it was closing the plant in Boisbriand because of an excess production capacity and a decreased demand for sports cars, federal representatives continued to work not only to find alternatives to the assembly plant, but also to promote the overall development of the auto industry in the region and throughout the province.

Besides promoting and facilitating new investment in Quebec's auto industry, the Government of Canada is supporting the development of new light materials, like aluminum and magnesium, for the design and manufacturing of the cars of the future.

Several public statements have been made to this effect. Bernard Landry, the Premier of Quebec, who was then finance minister, said, and I quote:

Aluminum, magnesium, light metals and our expertise help us keep our hopes high. If we can build planes, and we have the fifth largest aerospace industry in the world, we must be able to build cars.

He said it again in September 2001, "The future of our auto industry relies on aluminum and aluminum relies on the auto industry".

Even the leader of the Bloc leader Quebecois stated, in September 2001, "We will have to see if new models can be tested there or if aluminum can be used. We should not give up".

I could provide the House with many other statements that indicate that magnesium and aluminum are securing a most interesting position for Quebec on the world market. In terms of production and quality, it could give us quite an edge.

Supply

I can assure you that the Canadian government officials will keep working with all those concerned, as they are already doing. It is not true that the Canadian government is totally uninvolved. We will always support the Comité de soutien à l'industrie automobile dans les Basse-Laurentides, to promote future investment opportunities in this area. The Government of Canada is represented in these meetings and discussions.

Everybody knows that, after many years of record growth and production, the auto industry in Canada and in the United States has experienced a slowdown in the last couple of years.

Generally speaking, the auto industry has had to respond to several economic difficulties, including a general economic downturn, sluggish demand and a change in consumer preferences. Many companies had to restructure globally and to close down plants and eliminate jobs in Canada and in other countries.

The auto industry being in a restructuring phase because of production overcapacity, this has had an impact on tire production. In my riding, a Goodyear plant has over 1,500 workers. People are apprehensive about their future. When car sales drop, tire sales go down as well. There is a causal relation. We are already working with Goodyear to find a way for the company to reposition.

We should keep in mind that GM's situation is not unique, nor is the situation at the plant in Boisbriand.

The loss of the Boisbriand plant is unfortunate, but other plants have closed down. Even in Ontario, thousands of jobs have been lost lately in the auto industry. Every company in the auto industry is affected because of the intense competition on the world market. Everything is definitely not over for the workers, the community, or the industry.

Earlier, the hon. member for Joliette told an anecdote about Expro. In 1992, when I was a member of the National Assembly, we took real action on Expro, which is located in my riding. During the last election campaign, the Government of Canada was asked to once again get involved in the Expro issue, and the government did get involved by providing in excess of \$40 million.

• (1300)

It is just not true that the federal government always says no to plants that are located in Quebec. A job in Ontario, New Brunswick or Saskatchewan is a job in Canada. We must always work to preserve our jobs.

The situation in the auto industry is special. In Quebec, we have a major problem in that there is only one plant. There used to be two, during the eighties, when the Hyundai plant was in operation, but it is no longer in operation. GM is the only plant that we have left.

However, we have a choice. An automobile is made up of several components. There is a rear-view mirror and there is also a windshield at the front. The rear-view mirror is always smaller than the windshield. There is a reason for this: it is more important to know where we are going than where we have come from.

In GM's case, the solutions proposed by stakeholders, with the participation of the federal government, are forward looking. People are already looking ahead and they are trying to see what we can do

now, not in 10 or 20 years, to help the region, to preserve these jobs and to get the region's economy going again, both in the auto industry and in other industries.

In conclusion, we will oppose this motion. We cannot accept the blame for an issue in which we are involved on a daily basis. If there is an issue on which we will continue to work, it is Quebec's auto industry. The industry does not only build cars, it also manufactures major components, and this is what will help Quebec regain its position and play a major role on the international market.

• (1305)

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

I am perfectly willing to look ahead, through the front windshield, but I realize that we are just about to lose the one and only vehicle assembly plant in Quebec. I also agree to look forward through the windshield to see the 1,400 jobs that will be lost next September. While driving along, still looking ahead of me, nothing prevents me from looking in the rearview mirror and seeing the Liberal members from Quebec, who say they were members of the Standing Committee on Finance and the Standing Committee on Industry and were involved in the work done at committee level. However, it is important to realize that, from this point of view, the Liberal members from Quebec showed how ineffective they are.

In real terms, what is the Liberal federal government willing to invest, in terms of money, financial support or any other acceptable contribution, to rescue the 1,400 jobs at GM and to keep the industry in Quebec? In real terms, what is the federal government willing to do, today, to save the GM plant in Boisbriand?

Mr. Serge Marcil: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, it is not money that GM wants since it was offered more than \$300 million by the Quebec government and turned the offer down.

In any economic recovery project of that kind involving a government, like the Quebec government, the federal government also participates. As for those 1,400 jobs however, I also look through the windshield and see that the workers are protected by the company. It offers good protection programs. Ninety per cent of them will be eligible for early retirement. Under the collective agreements, they will collect their salary for up to three years. This will apply to 90% of 1,400 workers. It is a lot.

Not too many plants offer such a good plan. But this is not where the problem lies. The problem is not for the worker who will lose his job now or who will enjoy early retirement. The problem lies in the 1,200 to 1,400 jobs that we will be losing for a long time.

Supply

The young people who are currently in school getting ready to fill high technology positions will not be able to count on those 1,200 jobs to get on the job market. However, the Quebec government and the federal government can cooperate as we are doing now. There is actually close cooperation between the two governments to breathe new life into the auto industry in Quebec. With other sectors, other specialties and other niches, we will be developing new quality jobs in order to help young graduates find a job.

● (1310)

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like everybody to look through the same window. It is important if we want success in dealing with the GM issue. But that is not what is happening. The ball is being thrown back to us. We are being told that GM does not need money.

The situation is urgent. We could lose 1,400 jobs. The member, who was Minister of Labour, is fully aware of the very difficult situation that these people will be facing and the situation that is being created in the region. It is all very fine and well to manufacture parts, but without assembly plants, the auto industry will not get very far.

That industry must stay alive. As has been said, the need is there. We want the federal government's involvement; we have asked for it. The Minister of Industry was much more open earlier when he said that he was willing to look at possible solutions, that he was willing to go back to Detroit. Now all he has to do is ask the Prime Minister to join him.

So this is what I want to ask the member: if the minister is willing to do it, why, as parliamentary secretary, is he not willing to take the same position as the minister? This is not something for the next election campaign; we do not want bridges. We just want to save an industry that will shut down in September.

Mr. Serge Marcil: Mr. Speaker, we normally keep our promises.

An hon. member: Where are the bridges?

Mr. Serge Marcil: Yes, you will see. Even the sceptics will be proven wrong, as the saying goes.

We must not put constraints on the retransformation, as it were, of the auto industry in Quebec, by positioning it in a new market niche, whether that niche involves the production of parts from magnesium—of which we are one of the world's largest producers—or from aluminum.

Let us say that 85% of our exports and our production in Quebec, is with the Americans. Even if assembly plants are located elsewhere, in Mexico, the United States or Canada, if we can succeed in developing a niche in this field, it will obviously be an industry of the future, a structured industry. Then we can go on to phase II, transforming our aluminum or magnesium production.

I support the Minister of Industry's offer to go back to Detroit to meet with stakeholders. The message from the Minister of Industry earlier shows that we are working as closely with the Government of Quebec and the committee in question as we are with workers, unions, the mayor of the municipality and residents of the area. There is an exceptional partnership. As positions are developed, we

will be there. We will be there for the implementation of these solutions or proposals.

If the game plan involves organizing other meetings with GM's directors in Detroit, we will obviously take part. In conclusion, we are not on the outside. We are playing a part, as a government, just like the Government of Quebec, and we are prepared to work with the Government of Quebec as it looks for ways to breathe new life into the auto industry.

This is why I must vote against this motion calling on the House to condemn the Government of Canada for its failure to take action on this issue. I do not think this is the right approach. They want to make this a political debate, and this is the place to do so.

However, the Government of Canada, through the Department of Industry and Economic Development Canada, is taking an active role in this issue and we are going to work to develop forward-looking solutions for the area and for the auto industry.

Mr. Gérard Asselin: Mr. Speaker, the federal government must get involved concretely and immediately. We cannot afford, on such an issue, to wait three or four elections before responding.

The hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry promised his constituents bridges. He can show that he effectively discussed this with the Minister of Transportation and in committee and that this could be done within three or four elections. However, we cannot allow bridges to be built in the riding of Beauharnois—Salaberry while we are losing some 1,400 or 1,500 jobs in Boisbriand, through the closing of the GM plant.

What we need is for the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Industry to ask the minister and the Prime Minister of Canada, who is from Quebec, to get together with the Bloc Québécois in defending the interests of GM and GM workers and also to ask that the federal government pay attention to GM's needs, that is what is necessary after Quebec already invested \$340 million and was able to do a little more.

They should say: "What will you need? We, the federal government, are making a commitment, like we made a commitment with the United States after September 11 by saying to president Bush that we would give him our unconditional support". This cost us lives, equipment and money. Is the government able to give GM, in the Montreal region, the same thing it promised the United States, that is unconditional support?

● (1315)

Mr. Serge Marcil: Mr. Speaker, when we faced the PACCAR problem, both governments worked hand in hand. We managed to revive the plant with the FTQ's Fonds de solidarité, even though the company had reported profits in its financial statements.

We must be careful. Are governments only there to provide money? In this case, this is not the problem. It is not a problem of money, but of repositioning and restructuring of the auto industry around the world. The Government of Canada is willing to cooperate with the Quebec government on this issue.

Supply

When we are being asked what we will do concretely, we do what is being asked of us and we do it well.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel. Therefore, I will use 10 of the 20 minutes I am allotted to speak about this important issue, which the Bloc Québécois has chosen to debate on its opposition day. The issue of the GM plant closing involves 1,000 direct jobs and close to 10,000 indirect jobs in Quebec.

To begin with, I would like to read the motion because quite often in the House discussions go this way and that way, and in the end, we forget what the topic of the debate was supposed to be and which motion we were supposed to debate. I will read it again so that all those who are listening to us understand what we are talking about today. The motion states:

That this House condemn the government for its inability to defend the workers and the General Motors plant in Boisbriand and thus allowing the vehicle assembly sector of the Quebec auto industry to disappear.

The word inability may mean a lot of things. It may mean a lack of leadership, a lack of will. It may mean that one is only taking small steps while knowing that much more beneficial steps could be taken. It may mean that when the previous industry minister went to Detroit to meet with GM executives, he was in a negative frame of mind. He came out of his meeting throwing the towel right away saying “There is nothing we can do. There is no government program that can help GM workers keep their industry alive”.

It is similar to what they are saying now to sawmill workers in Quebec, “We cannot do anything for you. There are no other programs than the existing ones”.

Liberal members are telling us that they took action, but we are saying that they were not taken with a determination to succeed and they are not the real actions GM workers were entitled to expect.

What is GM? It is a company located in Boisbriand that has an impact over the entire region of the Lower Laurentians and even on my riding of Repentigny. Some of the people who work for GM live in my riding, because the plant is not that far from their home. When things go well at the plant, it has an impact on the whole town, region and extended region, just as when the plant is threatened with imminent closure.

GM has had its ups and downs, as the president mentioned. However, at one point, it was really doing great and providing a lot of jobs. Everyone in the region, restaurants, shops and other businesses thrived while GM was doing so well.

If the GM plant closes down, as was mentioned in this debate, we stand to lose 1,400 direct jobs and 9,000 indirect jobs all over the province, whether it be in the region of the Lower Laurentians, Lanaudière, Beauce, the Outaouais, the Eastern Townships, in south-west Montreal, and elsewhere. Smaller companies might also be forced out of business.

If the federal government does not get really involved in this area to help the Government of Quebec deal with this problem, the closure of this plant will unfortunately make headlines in September. However, we will not hear about all the small businesses that will go

under two, three or four months down the line, because of the government's inaction.

This problem reminds us somewhat of the Hyundai plant, this one located in Bromont. A few years back, governments invested money in this plant. A short time later, it shut down.

Need I remind hon. members that in 1987, governments gave GM a \$220 million loan? This was a situation similar to that of Hyundai in Bromont. The company needed to pay only the interests till 2017. By then, the loan will be worth \$2.6 billion.

GM cannot be said to be a very small or a small to medium size business. In 1987, GM's business and development plans must have provided the direction the company wished the auto industry would take in North America, in Canada and in Quebec in particular. A few years later, a company of that size announced the closing of the plant. The two levels of government will now have to pay about \$10 million a year simply in interest on GM's loan. In 2017, the governments will recover the principal, which will then have reached a value of \$2 billion.

● (1320)

Can we allow ourselves to give up when dealing with a company to which we gave a loan of \$220 million? Need I remind that, during the first quarter of 2002, this company reported rather generous profits for the auto industry? Governments should examine closely loans given in the automotive sector or elsewhere to companies that, two, three, four or five years down the road decide to pack up and leave. One of the conditions of the \$220 million loan was to guarantee the vitality and the survival of the plant at least until 2017. This is almost four years later and we have already known for a year that the plant will close.

Even if the parliamentary secretary of the industry minister or the minister himself tell us that the government is very much concerned by what is going on in Quebec, I asked myself a question this morning. If the industry minister or his parliamentary secretary were to come to Quebec to check up on an a sector of economic activity in which the federal government had invested for the last 5, 10, 15 or 20 years, in order to meet the employees who benefited from the federal government's grants, loans or programs, I wonder what type of industry or business the minister would visit.

Supply

I thought to myself, "If the minister were to visit Ontario, he would tour the auto industry". The federal government has invested billions, even tens of billions of dollars in the auto industry. The Minister of Industry would be fully justified in meeting with stakeholders in the auto industry to tell them, "I helped this industry to succeed. I am happy to come and meet with you, to look into the financial and economic situation of your industry. I am proud of what we have done in Ontario for the auto industry". In Quebec, I wonder what industry he would tour.

If he went to Alberta, he could see oil workers. He could say to them, "We are proud of the tens of billions of dollars that we invested to develop the oil sector, to develop this polluting fossil fuel energy that is making us back off from signing the Kyoto protocol. The federal government is proud of having invested tens of billions of dollars to develop this growth sector of Alberta's economy, making it a prosperous province. We feel somewhat responsible for this success".

If he were to come to Quebec to visit with people in the hydroelectric industry, sadly he would not be able to pat himself on the back and say, "We helped with this success". The Government of Quebec alone made it the wonderful success story that it is for Quebec.

If he were to go to the Maritime provinces, the Minister of Industry could visit with people who have benefited directly or indirectly from Hibernia. He would say to them, "With the tens of billions of dollars that we have invested in oil exploration and drilling, we are proud of what our government has accomplished in the Maritimes, mainly in Newfoundland, because tens of thousands of jobs have been created thanks to the billions of dollars invested by the federal government".

If he were to visit Hydro-Québec to look into new energy sources, the electric motor or the electric drive, he would appear to be a bit of an outsider. He has not made any direct investments there.

The federal government has demonstrated its lack of will and lack of leadership in Quebec's auto industry. Worse yet, the federal government has shown that it has no desire to develop a growth industry in Quebec. The federal government in Quebec can only be seen where it is required to have a presence: an employment office, a post office, a passport office. Otherwise, it is not there.

Why is the federal government present in those offices? Because it has no choice. I challenge any liberal member who will speak later on to tell me in which area of economic activity the federal government has poured massive support in Quebec and to which it can be identified.

The Quebec government is the only one present in the area of high technology, in hydroelectricity, in health and in the pharmaceutical industry, except for pharmaceutical patents.

That is why the former health minister never came to Quebec. He started pulling the plug on health funding in Quebec when he was minister. He will not come to Quebec as industry minister either because he has no reason to do so. The federal government has not invested in Quebec and is showing, once again today, that it has no intention of taking tangible measures to improve the situation in a fundamental area of economic activity, and to save the jobs of those

thousand employees who have been working in that industry for many years.

• (1325)

When they say they will create jobs for university graduates, they should also think of those who left school after grade 12 or junior college and who are looking for well-paying jobs. Not everyone who is looking for a job has a bachelor's or master's degree.

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for his excellent speech. He is directly involved, because people in his riding work at the Boisbriand plant.

I come from the Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière area and I also feel concerned, as does the member for Charlevoix, because there are several subcontractors in our regions, particularly in Beauce. This also shows how important a large job creating business can be in other sectors.

As the member for Laurentides mentioned earlier, it is all well and good for GM to say that jobs from subcontracting will be maintained in Quebec, but if there is no large business acting as the drive force and *raison d'être* for subcontractors, this will have dramatic consequences.

I pointed out earlier that the level of insecurity for GM workers was high. The same is true for workers of a shipyard in my riding. This is why I want to show solidarity with the members from the Basses-Laurentides region.

I am so involved, and I do not know if all the members are, that I will share a personal anecdote with the House. I have bought a GM car, precisely to show how important this is. But if GM were ever to go—this is not a threat, and is not intended as one either—it would be unfortunate. However, I consider this as a proof of solidarity.

I would like to congratulate the hon. member for his work and ask him to elaborate further on the impetus large businesses give small businesses.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Mr. Speaker, I hope you also drive a GM.

We all know how hard the member worked in connection with Davie Shipbuilding and how the financial health of a major industry in a region can have a definite direct and indirect impact on smaller businesses. It can affect all the businesses around the industry.

If the government were to ask me "What would you have done if you had been in office?", I would say, as I said earlier, that the federal government has totally ignored this particular economic sector. Yes, it has been sprinkling money, \$5 million for this and \$10 million for that, because it does not have any other choice. It has to. Statistically, about 20% of the funding should go to Quebec. We always end up being the losers, be it in R and D or any other sector. But, in this area, the federal government has to get involved and it does. That is what I would have been told. However, had the government party asked me how we would have dealt with this issue, I would have said that the private sector can be relied upon.

Supply

We know that Quebec has a nice environmental record and we know also that Canada has a bad one. Why does the federal government not tell the Quebec government “We will co-operate with you. We will work together, in the auto industry in Boisbriand for example, to find renewable energies and recyclable energies”.

Why do we not invest \$10 million, \$100 million or \$500 million in research and development to find an alternative to fossil energies, to polluting energies?

Why are we not providing financial support to Hydro-Québec for the development of its wheel-motor?

Why are we not helping this west coast industry—I was looking for its name this morning, but I have not found it yet—that is working on a renewable fuel cell for the automobile?

Why are we not working with those who are presently trying to develop cleaner fuel? For example, why are the federal government and the Quebec government not working at developing less polluting, cleaner vehicles?

I think that if the federal government was willing to act, to take action, it could, with the co-operation of the Quebec government, develop innovative energies, forward looking businesses, businesses that would allow Quebec to continue to be a leader in a major sector of economic activity, such as the auto industry.

Let us look at the Middle East crisis. We can see how important oil is to the western economy. Why are we not trying to become more self-sufficient, less dependent on oil exporting countries? In this way, we could develop our autonomy, our independence, a promising and positive sector of activity.

I am convinced that, with a little goodwill and imagination, we would succeed. Instead, ministers visit GM businesses and come back saying “There is nothing we can do for now; their leaders do not want to co-operate with us”. I find this is letting our guard down too quickly.

• (1330)

Hon. Denis Paradis (Secretary of State (Latin America and Africa) (Francophonie), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since we are talking about Quebec's investments with Ottawa, first I would like to remind my hon. colleague that last Monday we made a joint announcement with the Quebec premier in the riding of his colleague for Verchères—Les-Patriotes.

The Government of Canada is investing \$6 million and the Government of Quebec is investing \$6 million as well in what is called nanostructure, nanotechnology in microtechnology. Such cooperation is obvious in many sectors. It cannot be to say that Quebec is always investing alone and that the federal is absent is simply not true.

Going back to the GM issue we are concerned with, in my riding of Brome—Missisquoi, Saargummi, a firm that gets a lot of sub-contracts from GM, is presently seeing an increase in the number of its employees. We absolutely must continue, as my colleagues said, in order to get as many jobs as possible, keep them and develop that sector. Well, we are there now.

I would like to hear the hon. member for Repentigny comment on that.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Mr. Speaker, as you can see, therein lies the problem. They are patting themselves on the back for having invested \$6 million in Quebec. My reaction is: what about the more than \$10 billion for Hibernia, the more that \$60 billion in Alberta for oil, and several billion dollars in Ontario for the auto industry, compared with \$6 million in Quebec? The hon. member replied to my remarks.

• (1335)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will most certainly pursue this debate on the part the federal government must play in a discussion as important as this on the closure of the Boisbriand GM plant. As the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, I am able to state that one third of the Boisbriand plant workers live in my riding. I will therefore debate what the government's commitment to this must be.

The plant's production figures, the figures on the way the men and women of Quebec who work there make GM's investments across North America cost-effective, have been set out very well by my colleague, the hon. member for Laurentides, who is our labour critic. The efficiency of the Boisbriand plant is no longer open to question. It is the most productive of all GM plants in North America. The cost per employee is the lowest in Canada. GM therefore has no quibble with the productivity of Quebec workers.

If productivity is not at issue, our audience in Quebec and in Canada will wonder why the GM plant is being closed. Why are businesses being opened across Canada, and why are some being closed? Decisions are often political. That is the hard truth of the matter. That is what it comes down to today for the workers of Quebec.

I will quote from some newspaper articles. First, however, I would like hon. members to keep an important date in mind: September 6, 2001. This is when the Secretary of State for Regional Development in Quebec, now Minister of Justice, and an MP for Quebec, visited the GM facilities in Ontario, along with then Minister of Industry, Brian Tobin. During their visit to the Ontario facilities, they met with GM executives, on that date of September 6, 2001. After that meeting, the Secretary of State for Regional Development in Quebec, now Minister of Justice, announced to the people of Quebec that nothing more could be done for GM.

The following morning, in some erudite explanations to the media, he stated as follows. I am quoting from interviews he gave, including one with *La Presse*:

I do not see what federal programs could be used for this purpose.

He was of course referring to programs to get GM going again.

At most, there might be the Technology Partnership Canada program, which has been used by Bombardier for more than a decade, but that would have to be looked into. We are going to push to have the plant kept open. There are more than 1,000 good jobs at stake.

Supply

That is what the secretary of state for regional economic development in Quebec said following a meeting with GM representatives. He is the one who announced the closing of the plant to the people of Quebec. A few days later, the President of GM Canada announced that production at GM Boisbriand would end in September 2002. That is the reality.

We are being told today that the Government of Canada does not or did not have a say. However, it did announce the decision on September 6, 2001. That is the hard reality. It is the Liberal government, though its representatives, members of parliament from Quebec, who met with GM executives and who, after the meeting, announced the decision to close the plant. It is the secretary of state for regional economic development in Quebec, who is now the Minister of Justice, who announced that nothing could be done to save the plant.

I am sorry, but this announcement was made after a visit of GM facilities in Ontario by the person who was then the industry minister, Mr. Tobin. That is the reality. He announced the bad news because that was good for his career. He is today Minister of Justice. He announced the bad news to Quebecers. That is the harsh reality because, on that side, all the members from Quebec are going after a career here. They are building their careers on the backs of Quebecers. Today, Quebec's members of parliament are saying, "The Government of Canada did all it could to save the GM plant in Boisbriand". No, it did not.

• (1340)

They were the bearers of bad news. That is what they did. They came to Quebec to tell us the bad news concerning the GM plant in Boisbriand.

This is why I am saying today that the Bloc Quebecois' message is simply to tell the leader of the government, who is an MP from Quebec, that if he follows the logic of the comments he made during the election campaign, when he said that the auto industry was to Ontario what the aeronautical and aerospace industry was to Quebec—25% of aerospace manufacturing is done in Ontario—then he must see to it that Quebec has a 25% share of the auto industry.

The leader of the government must be the spokesperson on this issue on behalf of all Quebecers and on behalf of the Quebec auto industry. That is the reality.

Earlier, we heard about \$6 million in investments and a few hundreds jobs. In auto manufacturing, there are eight jobs for each job created in an assembly plant. That is the reality.

Despite the fact that we buy 28% of all GM cars sold in Canada and 25% of all cars sold in the country, as of September 2002, this government will have let the vehicle assembly sector disappear in Quebec. That is the reality.

That is what Quebecers must expect. They must remember that, on September 6, 2001, the secretary of state responsible for regional economic development in Quebec—

Mr. Gérard Asselin: Martin Cauchon.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: He is now the Minister of Justice, because he had a promotion for what he did on September 6, 2001.

That is the reality. Today, MPs from Quebec must rectify this situation. They must—

Mr. Gérard Asselin: Martin Cauchon.

The Deputy Speaker: Order please. The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, on a point of order.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am extremely respectful of the debates. Of course, we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and we have freedom of speech.

However, I believe there is a lack of decorum on the part of the member for Charlevoix who, every time the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel refers to the Minister of Justice, calls out his name.

I believe he should withdraw his comments.

The Deputy Speaker: To begin with, I respectfully submit that this is not a point of order. However, the rules are clear: a member is not allowed to refer to a colleague by his or her name, but rather by the name of his or her riding or by his or her title. I hope we can raise the level of the debate.

The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, all this to say that Quebecers should not let themselves be fooled by the Liberal government into believing that they have nothing to do with a business decision at GM Canada.

The multinationals of this world take no business decisions without consulting governments. This is a fact. And this is what happened on September 6, 2001, when the Minister of Industry of Canada, Mr. Brian Tobin, and the secretary of state responsible for the development of Quebec—

Mr. Gérard Asselin: Martin Cauchon.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: —who is now the Minister of Justice, met with representatives—

The Deputy Speaker: Order please. I am ready to accept a forceful debate, but the rules do not allow us to refer to a member by name.

I hope this is the last time I have to say this. The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I am not the one who referred to the minister by name. I hope you will respect the way I am making my speech. I did not refer to him by name.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. There is another rule in the House. We cannot do indirectly what we cannot do directly.

The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, all this to say once again that Quebecers have to understand that multinationals do not make business decisions; they make almost no business decisions without consulting governments.

This is what happened on September 6, 2001. The Minister of Industry of Canada, with the secretary of state responsible for development in Quebec—

Supply

Mr. Gérard Asselin: The member for Outremont.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: —now the Minister of Justice—

Mr. Gérard Asselin: The member for Outremont.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: —went to see the GM executives. Following this meeting, they announced the terrible news to GM Boisbriand workers, to Quebecers, that this plant would close in September 2002.

What we ask the House is to tell the federal government, “You have certain responsibilities. We believe that, as Prime Minister, the leader of the government must meet with GM Boisbriand management and ensure that Quebec gets its fair share of investment in the auto industry, since Quebecers buy more than 25% of the vehicles in Canada”.

• (1345)

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is an obvious lack of good will here. The government side tells us that everything has been done to try to solve the situation and get involved.

Just now there are here on the Hill some people that are actively involved in this matter. I would like to mention in particular Mr. Luc Desnoyers and Mr. Poirier, mayor of Boisbriand and Chairman of the Coalition to save the Boisbriand plant.

Brian Tobin—I guess I can call him by name since he no longer is a minister—promised last October, that is six months ago, to appoint two lobbyists and one administrative clerk. Nothing has been done yet. When they talk about the government's will to get involved, they are pushing it a bit far. They cannot even appoint the two lobbyists and the administrative clerk they were supposed to appoint to help move this item along. This was six months ago.

I would like to have my colleague's view on the matter.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I thank my colleague from Laurentides who is the Labour critic for our party and who has researched the matter well in order to present the situation as it is.

There is no will on the part of the federal liberal government to settle the GM Boisbriand matter. There is no such will and the mayor of Boisbriand came to say so today with workers and their union.

To follow up on my colleague's question, even if lobbyists were appointed now, it would probably be too late. He should have appointed them in the days following the announcement. This was six months ago already. It is probably too late.

What has to be done now is to protect the equipment and make sure that the plant is not demolished. This is the situation. This is what has to be done now.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know people are listening and I think the Bloc Quebecois member is making that speech in very bad faith.

The government of Canada, through all the ministers who worked on the issue, has had the opportunity to look for solutions and is still doing so. Why is this question being raised today? They are just now bringing that up. I discussed the fact with my colleague, the member for Hull—Aylmer, earlier.

We must not forget that the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel himself is a lobbyist. He would have liked to be a liberal federal candidate. He worked very hard to that end because, at the time, he really believed we were an excellent government.

One should not think that this situation with the GM plant in Boisbriand has just happened overnight and that nothing is being done. I know Luc Desnoyers. I worked with that man. We spoke together. He has been in constant communication with us. We have had some meetings. The Deputy Prime Minister himself, who was industry minister at the time, went to Detroit.

Instead of playing petty political games as they are doing right now, to take advantage of the situation and find a justification for their presence in Ottawa, the members should work with the government. That way, maybe they could show they have some good common sense.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party had sent its favorite lobbyist Mr. Alfonso Gagliano after me. It took me a few minutes to realize what this man was made of. I am proud to be a member of the Bloc Quebecois Party.

Especially when I see Quebec members, including the secretary of state for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, a member from Quebec, who, on September 6, 2001, after touring every GM facility in Ontario, went with the minister of Industry, Brian Tobin, to meet with the management, and told people in Quebec that nothing could be done to save the GM plant in Boisbriand and that it would close in September 2002, I am very proud to be a member of the Bloc Quebecois.

• (1350)

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member who just spoke for his speech. Indeed he showed how inefficient the member for Outremont, in charge of regional economic development for Quebec, was.

The reward he got from the Prime Minister was to be appointed Minister of Justice. Unfortunately, I do not have his picture to show as I cannot name him.

I cannot understand the federal government's lack of action in the auto industry, which needs financial help and technical support.

Right now, we are having a problem in Quebec with GM. I believe the Liberal federal government should offer its unconditional support as it did to the United States following the September 11 events. In the meantime, Toyota, Honda, Nissan, Hyundai and Volkswagen are expanding in Quebec at the expense of the industry that is not getting support from the federal government.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Charlevoix is right. Quebec is a big consumer of cars. All Quebecers are asking is fairness and our fair share of building these cars.

We account for over 25% of consumption and 28% of GM car buyers in Canada. We want GM to stay in Boisbriand. We want cars to continue being assembled in Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring my thoughts back to the individual workers who may be involved in this plant closing.

Private Members' Business

When any business closes, whether it is large or small, there is a human tragedy for the families. It is very difficult for a person to be unemployed and support a family. Our thoughts are with the workers and many other businesses in Canada that close or restructure for whatever reason. We must keep those families first and foremost in our mind.

The BQ motion regarding the closing of the plant in Sainte-Thérèse does not deserve the support of the House at this time. To start with, as all members know, this is not exactly new news. GM announced the plant's closure last September.

It is wrong to blame the Government of Canada for this closure when it has been working hard along with the government of Quebec for the past few years to prevent the plant's closure.

The previous federal industry minister travelled with the current Quebec premier to Detroit and made a joint case to GM executives for keeping the plant open. Do members opposite wish to condemn the premier of Quebec too or do they want to condemn local business people or Canadian auto worker unions that have worked hard to find a better solution? Do members opposite wish to condemn the mayor of Boisbriand and all the members of le Comité de soutien de l'industrie automobile dans les Basses-Laurentides who have been working tirelessly with GM and the federal government to come up with alternatives? Do they wish to condemn the Government of Canada for giving le Comité the financial support it needed to make its case?

If they do they would have to condemn themselves because some of their own representatives were on the task force, as were representatives of the Parti Québécois. Nobody likes to see plant closures, not in Quebec, not anywhere else in Canada. We should take a minute to step back and look at the details before we declare that the automobile industry has disappeared in Quebec and make all other kinds of dramatic economic predictions.

The simple truth is that the automobile industry in Quebec, far from having disappeared, is visible despite some setbacks and is a vibrant industry with good prospects for future growth.

Let us start with GM. It has announced that it will continue to source over \$850 million annually from over 700 Quebec suppliers. It has made a commitment to work closely with the government to develop further supplier production opportunities in Quebec. The company has stated that because of its sourcing initiatives in Quebec it will be creating at least as many jobs in the supplier companies in Quebec as will be lost at Sainte-Thérèse.

Members only have to look at some other recent investments in industry to understand that despite the hand wringing of members opposite the auto industry has a great future in Quebec. As hon. members may know, last November SaarGummi Automotive Group announced a \$40 million investment to build two new auto part plants and the creation of 800 new jobs in Magog, Quebec. On December 3, 2001, the Société de développement du magnésium announced a \$34 million investment to build a magnesium auto parts plant in Boisbriand which will create 100 new jobs. On December 18, 2001, Bridgestone-Firestone announced it will invest \$36 million to modernize its Joliette tire plant and to expand its product range.

GM stated that while the decision was painful, most of the 1,100 hourly employees, and 300 hourly employees currently on layoff at Sainte-Thérèse, are now eligible for early retirement or will become eligible within the next few years. It indicated that a majority of the employees were eligible for income continuation of up to three years and that the company would work closely with the CAW and with the Quebec and federal governments to put in place training and other transition assistance programs for those who want to continue their working careers.

● (1355)

We should also remind ourselves that despite our setback Canada remains one of the most attractive places in the world in which to do business. A recent study by KPMG Inc. has shown that Canada continues to be the low cost leader among industrial nations. The study looked at the comparative after tax cost in all leading industrial countries. It showed that Canada has one of the most attractive investment climates in the world. We are number one in biomedical R and D, advanced software, electronics assembly, content development, electronic systems testing, specialty chemicals, and shared services. We are competitive in every other economic sector.

The Deputy Speaker: Before proceeding to statements by members, I will take a point of order from the hon. member for Lakeland.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CANADIAN FORCES DAY

The House resumed from April 24 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I ask that Motion No. 334 on the order paper in the name of the member for Nepean—Carleton be concurred in by everyone in the House. We have talked to the other parties and I believe that concurrence will come forth.

I want to explain what the motion is about. It will put in place, on the first Sunday in June each year, a celebration to recognize our current serving Canadian forces members. I believe that is supported by all members in the House.

I would like to say as well that the member for Calgary Southeast has another motion which I will not tie to this one in any way, but which is every bit as valuable as this motion for which I am asking unanimous consent. I hope the government and all members in the House will approve both motions.

This motion is important to our soldiers and they deserve that recognition.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In the spirit of non-partisan equanimity with which this motion was just dealt, I seek unanimous consent to restore to the order of precedence and deem votable my Bill C-297, an act to promote the observance of two minutes of silence on Remembrance Day, similar in concept to this motion, for which I have sought consent previously. I would ask that if members are prepared to grant consent to the motion which was just agreed to, that in the spirit of fairness—

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

ORGAN DONATIONS

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week.

Deciding to become an organ or tissue donor is a very important personal decision. It is one that takes much thought, discussion and consideration. It is a decision which can have extraordinary results. By making the choice to be a donor we may someday give someone the gift of life. Once we have decided, it is very important to share our decision with our family.

Canada's organ donation rate ranks in the bottom half of countries in the western world where transplants are performed. More than 3,500 Canadians are waiting for an organ transplant. Several people die each year while waiting for an organ transplant. Canada has some of the best transplant technology in the world, some of the most highly skilled surgeons, and some of the most prestigious transplant hospitals, but there are never enough organs available.

Let us all work together to improve organ and tissue donations in Canada.

* * *

● (1400)

BILL C-297

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, since 1997 I have had a private member's bill to encourage all Canadians to profoundly observe a wave of silence across the country on Remembrance Day. The bill is modeled on a motion that passed through both the Westminster parliament and the Ontario legislature. It has been endorsed by every major veteran's organization in Canada and has received 60,000 signatures in support in the largest petition tabled in this parliament.

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However on five separate occasions, including one just a moment ago, I have sought unanimous consent to have the bill deemed votable. I regret that two members from the Progressive Conservative Party decided not to grant it that status.

When we have meritorious bills of this nature before the House which are symbolic in nature and which seek, for example, to increase observance of the commitment of our armed forces and the sacrifices of our war dead, we ought to treat these matters in a completely non-partisan fashion.

I hope that in the future all members will give proper consideration and will not attempt to use private members' business to treat bills from one party differently than bills that emerge from a member in another party.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Paddy Torsney (Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize a remarkable Canadian, Mr. Herb Hilgenberg, a private citizen of Burlington who provides a titanic public service every day.

Fifteen years ago this retired business executive and self-taught weather forecaster began an interesting hobby that quickly grew. For the last decade and a half Herb Hilgenberg has spent 10 hours a day, seven days a week, providing personalized marine weather forecasts to sailors and commercial vessels on the Atlantic passages from his home office, free of charge.

He uses the Internet, two computers, two satellite dishes, four radios and a fax machine, and predicts the weather with an accuracy rate of 95%. He is so accurate that as many as 90 commercial ships and sea-going yachts check in with Herb each day. The U.S. national weather service and the U.S. navy use his information and techniques.

American and Canadian search and rescue agents have asked Herb for assistance in finding missing vessels and the Canadian Coast Guard nominated Herb for a national search and rescue award.

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ST. LAWRENCE SCHOOL

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the students from St. Lawrence School to Ottawa today. The students have travelled to Ottawa from my riding of Scarborough Centre to visit the impressive parliament buildings and, of course, to see firsthand how their government works. This experience will no doubt be an enriching addition to what they have already learned in the classroom and will leave a lasting impression on them for the rest of their lives.

I have had the opportunity to visit the school on occasion and speak with the students as to how government works. I believe it is imperative for Canadians of all ages to visit the capital and bear witness to the legislative process at work. As such, I extend an invitation to all my constituents to do as the students of St. Lawrence School have done, which is to visit our capital and the parliament buildings.

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I again welcome the students of St. Lawrence School and thank them for visiting us in Ottawa today. I am sure this visit will leave an everlasting impression and make them proud to be Canadians.

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[*Translation*]

SOCIÉTÉ RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Georges Farrah (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for over a month, Canadian taxpayers have been deprived of a service to which they are entitled, quality French language broadcasting. This interruption in service has hit regions such as the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands particularly hard, by depriving the people there of news of their community. This service, so essential to the cohesion of our regions, must be restored immediately.

Within minutes of the start of a legal 24 hour walkout on March 22, the management of Radio-Canada ordered a lockout. This has had economic repercussions on small communities.

More than two weeks ago, the Minister of Labour asked Radio-Canada to resume the negotiations interrupted after the union demonstrated on Parliament Hill.

Radio-Canada refuses to address the problems underlying the conflict, in particular job instability, which affects half of the membership of this crown corporation's communications union.

While passing no judgment on the validity of either party's position, we are calling upon the President of CBC—Radio-Canada, Robert Rabinovitch, to immediately restore this public service and to issue a clear mandate to his negotiators: to settle honourably and in completely good faith the underlying problems behind this conflict.

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• (1405)

[*English*]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the B.C. Lumber Trade Council has the facts the international trade minister needs to settle the Canada-U.S. softwood lumber dispute. Myth: Canada controls one-third of the U.S. market because of subsidies. Fact: The U.S. industry has been unable to meet its lumber demands for decades.

American consumers love Canadian softwood lumber. They buy \$7 billion a year worth of it. They cannot get enough. It is a select few U.S. lumber producers who do not like our wood and for two decades they have been trying to keep our softwood out.

The U.S. coalition for fair lumber imports said that 133 mills closed because of Canadian imports. What a myth. Only 7 of these 133 U.S. mills admitted to that and as many as 14 closed due to a shortage of timber. Other mills closed due to inefficiency or difficulties exporting to Japan. Some of these 133 mills did not even close.

The government should use the facts to counter the myths perpetuated in the Canada—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton.

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EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

Mr. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today a very prominent and experienced advocate for employment equity rights has paid us a visit. Cari Dominguez, the chair of the United States equal employment opportunity commission, today took time from her busy schedule to appear before the parliamentary committee reviewing the Employment Equity Act, to share with us the work of the commission and her experience as a long time advocate of equal opportunity and diversity.

In a previous position at the department of labour, Ms. Dominguez took a leading role and launched the department's glass ceiling initiative to remove barriers in the workplace as a result of race and/or gender.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ms. Dominguez for her very timely and productive working visit to Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SENEGAL

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thanks to an initiative by the Fonds de solidarité de la FTQ, a solidarity fund will be established in Senegal.

The board administering this fund, under the aegis of the Senegal national workers confederation, comprises the country's main labour and management organizations, as well as well as associations from the country's informal sector. It has received financial support from the Agence intergouvernementale de la Francophonie, and the Government of Quebec.

This fund basically reproduces the Quebec model but, of course, takes into consideration the necessary adaptations for the economic, social and cultural specificity of Senegal.

Initially, the fund will be involved in job creation by providing financial and technical assistance to small and medium size local businesses in getting started, resuming operations, consolidating their operations, or expanding their production capacity.

Quebec is, therefore, contributing to the birth of Senegalese economic strength. As a result, the Senegalese will be masters of their own domain.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Sarmite Bulte (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House, a member from the Bloc Québécois made, in reference to a colleague, misleading allegations to the effect that she is in a conflict of interest because both she and her husband have a job.

This is completely offensive. We live in one of the most advanced societies in the world. Women have overcome a great many barriers and have assumed their rightful place in society.

We are equal to men. This is a recognized fact. Women now have a wide range of choices. Like men, we can pursue a career and have a family at the same time. It is not necessary to choose between the two.

The allegations made by the member from the Bloc Québécois are an affront to women across Canada.

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[English]

CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, our troops are serving this country remarkably well, both in Afghanistan and around the world. The United States recognizes this and wants to award medals to our service personnel. We have heard nothing from this government on that yet.

If we take a look at history, this government's unwillingness to honour our soldiers for being soldiers is predictable. Our soldiers performed admirably in the battle of the Medak pocket, but instead of proudly announcing the victory to the Canadian people our government chose to hide it.

In 1991 in Kuwait, members of the combat engineer regiment gave immeasurable assistance to American soldiers after an explosion of a munitions dump which wounded nearly 300 Americans. This government decided not to tell Canadians about the bravery of their soldiers to avoid embarrassing the Americans.

While serving in the former Yugoslavia, Lieutenant Colonel Pat Stogran, currently leading our troops in Afghanistan, acted with courage and professionalism. Once again Canadians were not told about his bravery and he was not recommended for a medal by the Canadian government until this government learned over an American network that acknowledged what he had done. It was 12 days before the program aired before this government did anything.

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• (1410)

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Diane St-Jacques (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Bloc Québécois implied that a woman cannot have a career in politics and maintain her independence with respect to her spouse's commitments.

Does the Bloc Québécois believe that all of the women elected from its ranks merely represent the men in their lives?

Does the Bloc Québécois believe that a woman, such as Quebec's minister of finance for example, cannot sit in the National Assembly in an independent manner because her husband has an important position at the Société générale de financement?

We on this side of the House believe that all women who choose a career in politics can carry out their duties honourably. We believe

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that the world of politics must reflect Canadian society, a society in which there are women. The contribution of women to parliament is invaluable and essential.

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[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago at a Winnipeg Safeway a masked gunman attempted to rob an armoured car in broad daylight. Though the robbery was foiled, the gunman opened fire and the guards were forced to return fire to defend themselves. This is but the latest in a string of similar events.

Other than under federal government firearms legislation, there is effectively no regulation of this sector. There are no regulations requiring businesses to use armoured cars in specified situations. There are no minimum requirements in terms of training or safety equipment. There is no requirement for a minimum number of guards per unit. There is no mandated times when pickups should be made to avoid potential harm to bystanders.

The increasingly dangerous working conditions faced by armoured car guards and the threats to public safety associated with robbery attempts should be addressed through the passage of national legislation requiring more effective training, more guards making pickups and more careful planning of when those pickups take place.

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[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY ACT

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we were very pleased to learn that Bill C-42, the Public Safety Act, which the government introduced last fall following the events of September 11, had been withdrawn.

While fighting terrorism is more essential than ever to protect our fundamental values, the Bloc Québécois has always stressed the importance of maintaining a fair balance between security and the protection of rights and freedoms, which are the very foundations of our democracy.

Bill C-42 did not preserve this balance at all and it would have given a dangerous discretionary power to the Minister of National Defence by allowing, among other measures, the suspension of the rights of citizens through the creation of military security zones, something which could have led to abuse.

If the government comes back with an amended version of this legislation, the Bloc Québécois will oppose any measure that would give extravagant powers to the minister or could be an irritant for democracy.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I was shocked to hear the senseless dribble coming from the member for Roberval.

Oral Questions

He questioned the integrity of my colleague, the hon. member for London West, by insinuating that the fact that she is married makes her subordinate to her spouse. The member implied that she cannot think for herself or act on her own, without him.

It may be that his fellow Bloc Quebecois members have this obsolete opinion of marriage and that they too believe that female Bloc Quebecois members who are married are indeed under the authority of their husband.

We Liberal members are definitely living in the 21st century. We female members of the Liberal Party do not at all submit to our spouses. We do not walk two steps behind them, but alongside, as proud equals in this partnership and with our heads held high.

It comes as no surprise that a party like the Bloc Quebecois, which is stubbornly sticking to its obsolete idea of a submissive and humiliated Quebec, also wants to stick to such an outdated notion of marriage.

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[English]

ORGAN DONATIONS

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Mr. Speaker, April 22 to 28 is National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week. This is an opportunity for each and every one of us to make a huge difference in the lives of others.

At this moment, close to 4,000 Canadians are waiting for an organ or tissue donation. Sadly, over half of them will die waiting. One donor with healthy organs can save the lives of up to nine people and their tissues can help up to forty people improve their quality of life.

I urge everyone over the age of majority to sign a donor card. They should sign up with their provincial registry and make their wishes known to their families. They can show they care by becoming donors.

* * *

BALSILLIE ROY COLLECTION

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Peterborough is fortunate to have acquired the Balsillie Collection of Roy Studio Images. This collection contains 400,000 glass and film images taken by three generations of local photographers, the Roy family. The collection, dating back to 1896, survived in a downtown cellar, partly by luck and partly by good management.

The collection documents the life of a century in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada. Family life, commerce, industry, culture, including fashion and architecture, and dramatic local events are all on record there. The Balsillie collection is a unique national treasure.

I commend all those involved with the accumulation and acquisition of this collection, including the Roy family, Jim Balsillie, the city of Peterborough and the fundraising committees. George Mitchell, Lynne Cooper, Rob Rusland and John Lyon deserve special mention as do the staff and board of the Centennial Museum and Archives.

I recommend to the House Jim Leonard's Peterborough Historical Society's publication on this topic.

• (1415)

HEROISM

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, heroes seldom enter into our everyday lives but when they do their actions leave a deep impact upon our families, communities and country.

Alyson King, a Chilliwack, B.C. grade seven teacher, is such a hero. Two days ago, while leading a group of her students on a camping trip near Stave Lake, cries were heard coming from the frigid water. Two boaters and their baby daughter had capsized their canoe.

Selflessly, Alyson dove into the icy lake, swam 100 metres out to the frantic victims and brought them to shore. The hypothermic canoeists had been in the water for 30 minutes. The students were also involved as they gave their sleeping bags, blankets and sweatshirts to warm the freezing family until help arrived. Alyson said of the victims "They were just people. We're all equal. For me that was a big thing. I just wanted to help".

I say this to Alyson King and her students. Their courage has inspired us. Their compassion has made us proud. Their selflessness has saved a family. They are true Canadian heroes.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

ETHICS COUNSELLOR

Mr. John Reynolds (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, who says this government is out of ideas? Apparently, the Prime Minister has a great new policy initiative that he announced in caucus yesterday: tell Canadians the Liberals are honest. That is refreshing. Instead of blaming the media and the opposition for the perception that 70% of Canadians have that this government is corrupt, the Prime Minister should take some real action.

I ask the Deputy Prime Minister to commit today to immediately bring forward legislation to create an independent ethics counsellor reporting directly to parliament.

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since we were elected, the appointment of the ethics counsellor has occurred. We have seen him frequently at parliamentary committees. We have also seen the tabling of a strengthened code of conduct for public office holders. We have seen the auditor general given the authority to report to parliament four times a year. We have strengthened the Lobbyist Registration Act and in fact made it the toughest lobbyist law in the western world. We have had the appointment of an integrity officer to deal with concerns of an ethical nature within the public service.

Oral Questions

At the end of the day, what we have in Canada is a system which has a reputation of transparency and honesty, not just here, but everywhere.

Mr. John Reynolds (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, 70% of Canadians think the governments are corrupt. The Prime Minister blames the media. The Prime Minister blames the opposition. Perhaps he even wants to blame the polling company.

The public is disgusted because of smelly land deals in public works. The public is disgusted because of personal grants and funding for the heritage minister and cloudy relationships in the finance department.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister finally admit that his current position and the current position of his government is an absolute failure and immediately tell the House that they will bring in legislation to have an ethics counsellor who reports directly to all of parliament?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will not get into a debate about how questions are posed in public opinion polls but I do point out to the hon. member that the language used in challenging and questioning government needs to be very carefully used.

The truth is that of course there are things to raise questions about and there are legitimate areas of debate but the tendency to impugn personal integrity when the issue has to do with administration and rules are things that contribute to that false impression.

Mr. John Reynolds (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the truth. We learned through access to information that the finance minister may have never consulted with the ethics counsellor about his department's relationship with Jim Palmer, his Alberta bagman.

The ethics counsellor told us that he has no record of the minister asking for his advice on Mr. Palmer. The Prime Minister said that the case was closed. The finance minister invoked the ethics counsellor as his defence, yet the ethics counsellor, in a letter we received from him today, told us that he has no records on the matter.

Is anyone over there being honest on this issue?

• (1420)

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be very interested to read the letter.

An hon. member: Say when.

Hon. John Manley: Well pass it over.

Mr. Wilson has made public statements regarding his review of the questions but the Prime Minister has indicated that he wants to see rules for these campaigns and we will do it.

However the opposite side of the House went through a leadership campaign which had no transparency and none of the contributors' names listed and they claim to want to be the next government. Who are they fooling?

Mr. Grant Hill (Macleod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, what we requested from the ethics counsellor was a copy of the report prepared by the office of the ethics counsellor regarding the Minister of Finance and his Calgary lawyer, Jim Palmer.

The answer we received back from the ethics counsellor was "We have no records of any such transaction".

My question is very straightforward. The finance minister defended himself by saying that he had been in touch with the ethics counsellor. Where are those records?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the ethics counsellor himself responded publicly to some of these allegations but the result is that we are no further ahead.

The issue really becomes: What declarations should there be of financial contributions. The Prime Minister has indicated that he believes there should be public declaration.

The party opposite claims that it wants to be in government. Who funded its leadership candidates? Does it believe in public disclosure? Does it believe in transparency or does it not?

Mr. Grant Hill (Macleod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I simply ran for the leadership. What I did was step down from my position. I did not stay in a position of trust. That is ethics.

All we ask is that if anybody enters a leadership campaign he or she should step down as a cabinet minister. Why does the Deputy Prime Minister not recognize that as the ethical standard?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, either the hon. member is declaring today that he never wishes to be a minister of the crown or he should perhaps disclose where his contributions came from. It is about transparency and openness and either the Alliance members believe in it or they do not.

Furthermore, the real issue here becomes: Why do they want to make accusations when they have no evidence of any personal wrongdoings. They are trumping things up for pure and simple political purposes.

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[Translation]

MICROBREWERIES

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is perfectly legal for the husband of the member for London West to lobby for the major breweries. Generally speaking, it is equally acceptable for the member to chair the Standing Committee on Finance, except when a matter discussed has a direct impact on her husband's interests and on those of the industry he represents.

The member for London West should have withdrawn, as the Minister of Finance does when cabinet discusses shipbuilding, in order to avoid any appearance of conflict of interest.

Could the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister tell us whether the guideline which applies to the Minister of Finance also applies to the chair of the Standing Committee on Finance?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the committee's legal counsel said that, unfortunately, beer was not included in the bill. That was the decision.

There is a procedure whereby a committee may raise a question concerning one of its decisions. They did not avail themselves of it.

This sort of attack on the personal integrity of the committee chair is shameful.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what is shameful is pretending not to know that amendments were put forward so that beer could be considered in connection with the review of Bill C-47. But these amendments were rejected by the chair herself. That is what has us worried.

By using this twisted logic, is the government not taking the side of the big breweries to the detriment of microbreweries, when the person representing the former is the husband of the committee chair?

• (1425)

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is trying to make a mountain out of a molehill.

All that happened was that a ruling was made. It was a legal matter. The committee clerk said that it was not votable. That was the decision. They may raise the issue and present their arguments. However, attacking the personal integrity of the chair is shameful.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister's comments are totally, and I mean totally, unacceptable.

The chair of the Standing Committee on Finance, using her authority as chair, dismissed all of the amendments that dealt with microbreweries. As such, she settled the big breweries' problem.

In leaving out microbreweries, was the committee chair not in a total conflict of interest when she used her authority to solve the problem of the big breweries, for whom her husband works as a lobbyist?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have already learned that this was the opinion of the committee clerk. This was a legal opinion on an issue involving the bill. It is perfectly simple.

What is not acceptable is the member for Roberval's idea that a woman is the property of her husband.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in making such a statement, the Deputy Prime Minister just stooped to an intellectual level that I shall not describe.

What I said yesterday, and what I maintain today, is that when a person with parliamentary authority makes decisions that help the group for which her husband is a lobbyist, it is a conflict of interest. That is what I said, and I stand by that statement.

I dare him to rise and repeat what he just said.

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a

passage from *Macbeth* applies here: "full of sound and fury signifying nothing".

It is simply wrong. There is no conflict of interest. This is a political attack against the integrity of the committee chair, despite the legal opinion of the clerk.

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[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment and it has to do with the way in which the government's message on Kyoto has mutated from several months ago when it assured us that it would ratify and implement Kyoto. Now the government is offering a number of reasons why it cannot ratify Kyoto unless it has provincial permission.

Given the fact that we have an excellent study called the "Bottom Line on Kyoto: Economic Benefits of Canadian Action", why is the Government of Canada appearing to allow the government of Alberta and Premier Klein to veto the Kyoto accord? Who is running the country here?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no question of any provincial premier vetoing the decision of the federal government with respect to the ratification of any international agreements.

The report referred to by the hon. member is a very useful part of the discussion on the issue of ratification and on the benefits that could occur through ratification and through taking measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but that was not a Government of Canada study. We are awaiting the federal-provincial-territorial working group, which is expected to report early next month.

• (1430)

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of the Environment feels that the Kyoto accord is of such benefit why is the government not prepared to do this despite what the government of Alberta thinks?

With respect to another province, the province of Ontario and the privatization of Ontario Hydro, what is the government's view of the effect that this privatization might have on keeping commitments like the Kyoto accord; the temptation to burn coal, for instance, because it is cheaper on the part of the private sector?

Are there any studies that the federal government has done on the privatization of Ontario Hydro and what is the government's position on the privatization of Ontario Hydro?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the ownership of any facility producing power, the ownership is not the issue for the Government of Canada. The issue is whether or not they meet the requirements of the agreements that we have with respect to pollution or emissions.

Oral Questions

With respect to Ontario, I can repeat that while we were pleased with the decision by the Ontario government to make some reductions on the emissions from the power plants owned by the Ontario government, they do not achieve the goals that we have set. We expect the Ontario power plants, regardless of who owns them, to go further in terms of reducing emissions.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has called the leaks and dents on the used submarines a minor problem. Also, the minister has stated that the subs were inspected before they were purchased and that he will table any such inspection reports in the House.

Could the minister inform the House today whether he is aware of any other serious technical or physical problems with these four submarines the government has purchased?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to express appreciation to all members of the House for the approval of the motion from the hon. member for Nepean—Carleton with respect to an annual Canadian forces day.

With respect to the specific question, as I indicated yesterday, what information is appropriate to file we will file. The leak has been fixed. The dent is a minor matter. It will in fact be fixed.

The inspections were carried out initially by the royal navy when it took possession of the submarines and subsequently by both of our navies when they were put back in service.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, it will cost millions and millions of dollars to fix the dent.

Could the minister confirm that every single hull valve on the HMCS *Victoria* may have to be replaced, costing millions and millions of dollars? Furthermore, it has come to my attention just this week that at least three of the four subs have potential metal fatigue which could cause catastrophic flooding.

Did the British advise the government of these problems? Could the minister also tell us what the total cost will be?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the dent, the hon. member continues to exaggerate. She says that it will cost millions and millions of dollars. It is estimated at less than \$400,000. If in fact it turns out to be something we inherited when the boats were turned over to us, then of course we will put in an appropriate claim.

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LEADERSHIP CAMPAIGNS

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, where is transparency when we need it?

Joe Thornley owns a company that has a standard contract to provide communications advice to Heritage Canada. Now Joe Thornley is organizing fundraising events for the heritage minister's leadership bid.

If this is not improper use of public funds, if this is not government corruption, what is?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is exactly the kind of debasement of the language that all of us in public life need to be concerned about.

There are rules around contracting and contracts issued in the public service. If the hon. member thinks they were not followed let him bring those allegations forward and we will see. If he thinks Mr. Thornley is not properly registered under the Lobbyist Registration Act let him make a complaint.

However for him to stand in his place in the House of Commons under parliamentary privilege and make accusations of corruption without a single iota of evidence is simply scandalous.

• (1435)

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Oh, yes, Mr. Speaker, it must be a coincidence. It is just a coincidence that ministers of the government allow their departments to give grants to people who just happen to be raising money for people who are out there trying to become prime minister.

Just how long is it going to be in this country before people are just sick and tired of the government using their taxpayers' dollars to promote ministers to try to be prime minister? Just how long is that going to be?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member alleges a grant. Let him produce one piece of evidence about a grant, one piece of evidence that somebody received a grant. It is false.

Second, let us talk about waste. Let us talk about their words before. These are the people who thought that Stornoway was a waste. They thought parliamentary pensions were a waste. They thought having a chauffeur driven car for the Leader of the Opposition was a waste.

The people of Canada are going to conclude that voting for the Alliance is a waste.

* * *

[Translation]

MICROBREWERIES

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, considering the economic importance of microbreweries and the difficult situation in which they find themselves because of the unfavourable treatment to which they are subjected, compared to their foreign competitors, should the government not urgently use the opportunity provided by Bill C-47 to ensure microbreweries are extended the same treatment as small wine producers and ignore the intense lobbying by major breweries?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. gentleman knows that such an amendment to Bill C-47, as ruled by the chair of the finance committee, on professional advice, is outside the scope of the bill as tabled in the House. That is not to say that the tax treatment of microbreweries is an unimportant matter. It obviously is, but it would require a separate and distinct piece of legislation.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, large breweries know full well that as they buy time, competitors in the microbreweries sector grow fewer, and they can just keep increasing their share of the market.

Does the government not realize that by yielding to the lobby of major breweries, as it did at the Standing Committee on Finance, it is directly contributing to the elimination of microbreweries, which are caught between their foreign competitors, who benefit from a favorable tax treatment, and large breweries, which just want to bump them out of the market?

Hon. John McCallum (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what lack of imagination on the part of Bloc Quebecois members. They asked the same question five times in the past 24 hours.

Here is a good question for them. Why has the Quebec economy been so strong over the past 12 months, creating 40% of all jobs in Canada? This is a good question that they could have asked. The answer is that federal policies have greatly contributed to the strong growth of the Quebec economy.

* * *

*[English]***GOVERNMENT OF CANADA**

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, 70% of Canadians are openly condemning the Liberal government as corrupt. A litany of untendered deals. Contracts are missing. Liberal leadership candidates hide behind ethics counsellor's rulings but when we check them out, there are no rulings or no record of any discussions.

Is not the real issue here and the real problem the missing ethics of these guys on the other side?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact that the hon. member stands up and claims that a poll said something it did not raises questions about the ethics of the person asking the question.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister ranted and raved and tried to blame everyone else about his government's continued failings, but no matter how he rants and raves the public is no longer buying that self-serving Liberal spin.

Untendered contracts that clearly benefit Liberal friends is not a false impression, as the Deputy Prime Minister would have us believe, of any corruption.

When will the Prime Minister clean up his cabinet and rein these guys in? Who is in charge?

● (1440)

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, if the hon. member has some particular complaint about contract processes, then let him bring that to the appropriate place and raise it. We have a committee of the House that deals specifically with those items. Let him raise it.

The government issues many, many contracts per day. Surely they can find some that are worth complaining about, but then to try to turn that into an allegation of overall corruption is the kind of debasement of the language that is very unfortunate in this place.

* * *

*[Translation]***ORPHAN CLAUSES**

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Force Jeunesse and representatives from several groups, including the Bloc Quebecois and the Parti Quebecois are particularly supportive of the young Radio-Canada employees now on strike to protest their lack of job security, a form of discrimination in disguise.

We are not asking the Minister of Canadian Heritage to interfere in the negotiations. We are asking her to show the same courage vis-à-vis these young people that she showed when she denounced other forms of discrimination at Radio-Canada and said that they had better stop, and soon.

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour and Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when there are issues under dispute during collective bargaining, they should be brought to the table.

If there is an issue under dispute at Radio-Canada, it should be brought to the negotiating table and included in the collective agreement.

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Canadian Heritage wants to demonstrate her lack of political courage, she is free to do so.

My question is for the Minister of Labour, and it is very clear. Is the minister prepared to pass legislation prohibiting the use of orphan clauses in the Canada Labour Code? Yes or no?

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour and Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, they are already negotiating. We will see what is in the collective agreement and then we will see what has to be done.

Oral Questions

[English]

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is clear why 70% of Canadians consider the government corrupt. Minister after minister serves as evidence for this obvious conclusion and yet the Prime Minister wants more evidence. We already have the ethics counsellor working overtime to deal with what we have.

Why will the Prime Minister not see the obvious and admit that he has failed to take the real steps necessary to deal with this serious problem?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the actual question asked by the pollster was: Do you personally think that the Canadian political system is corrupt?

That is not this government. That includes the hon. members, it includes the leadership candidates in the Alliance Party and it is caused, in part at least, by the extreme, the excessive, language that they repeatedly use, rather than questioning government operations and administration, every time to impugn the morality of people on the other side. It is not acceptable.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the executive and the cabinet represent the political system and Canadians see them as corrupt.

The Prime Minister is among the minority of Canadians who do not see the government as corrupt. It must be lonely at the top of that shaky tower.

Will the minister stop blaming the media? Will he stop blaming the opposition? Will he stop ducking his responsibilities and will he take real steps to deal with the problems of his executive and his cabinet ministers?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a continuation of the empty allegations, the impugning of integrity without any facts.

Look at the list of things that opposition members have come to this place proclaiming to believe in. They change their minds as soon as they arrive. They are part of the political system. Their rhetoric on Stornoway, their rhetoric on pensions and their reversal of field contribute directly to that imputation of corruption that they are part of. We had all better tone down our rhetoric.

* * *

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mr. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday during the hour reserved for private members' business we saw the frustration that members experience. I have a great deal of sympathy for the member for Nepean—Carleton in getting his motion adopted. I have also a great deal of sympathy with the member for Calgary Southeast who blocked consensus. This is evidence of a system that does not work.

We have other bills and motions. The bills of other members that meet the criteria are sometimes not given votable status.

When I raised this issue, the government House leader said he would look into it with the leaders of the parties opposite. Where are those discussions and where are we on this—

● (1445)

The Speaker: The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe we do in the House have a dysfunctional and unsatisfactory system for determining the votability of private members' business. When I say we, I mean all of us together as parliamentarians.

I would note that the government does not have a majority on the subcommittee that presently decides these things. The opposition outnumbers the government four to two, so we all need to work together on a solution.

The House leaders are meeting to discuss this topic. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will be working on it as well. We need creative solutions, not just the bellowing from a bunch of buffoons.

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HEALTH CARE

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I assume the health minister has taken note of the most recent statistics showing drug costs going through the roof. I hope she understands how untenable this situation is and realizes that if there is one issue that threatens the sustainability of public health care in Canada today it is this issue of escalating drug costs.

I hope she is revisiting some of the old, broken Liberal promises for such things as a national drug plan and reduced patent protection.

I want to know, what is her plan today to rein in uncontrolled drug costs?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is probably aware that as part of the September 2000 accord on health care the first ministers spoke to the challenge of increased drug costs. In light of that accord, federal, provincial and territorial ministers are working together. We are working on a common review process. We are looking at both cost effectiveness issues and utilization issues in relation to prescription drugs.

The hon. member raises a very serious concern, but it is one to which there are not any easy solutions and we will only be able to find a solution if health care professionals and federal, provincial and territorial ministers work together.

*Oral Questions***CANADA POST**

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada Post has just reported its seventh consecutive profitable year, doubling its net income over the previous year, yet it continues to deny the most basic labour rights to thousands of rural route mail couriers. These workers have no EI, no CPP and no health and safety legislation and they are denied the right to free collective bargaining.

Will the minister for Canada Post finally remedy this historic injustice and will he agree that rural route mail couriers should be entitled to all the rights that all ordinary workers in Canada enjoy?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that Canada Post Corporation is an arm's length crown corporation. I do not direct it as to how it manages its day to day operations.

I think all members of the House ought to applaud the fact that an organization which years ago used to cost the taxpayer significant transfers of money year after year is now generating real profits because it is operating its business effectively and efficiently. That is the objective it has achieved.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, a British sub expert who came to Canada and was hired to help fix the new Canadian submarines told me recently that the problem with the subs is simply that they have had zero maintenance since they landed in Canada. He also told me that Canada does not have the infrastructure, tools or training to service these subs. He even went on to say that without service the subs may just as well be used in the movies as props.

Will the minister tell us, is it his intention to upgrade the facilities at Halifax so he can provide service for the submarines or is he just going to turn them all over to the Minister of Canadian Heritage for the movies?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry the hon. member has had wrong advice. Canada has a long experience with submarines. We have expertise here. We have systems that are being put in place to continue to in fact maintain and upgrade the submarines as we go along and to put them into service just as quickly as possible.

● (1450)

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, the British submarine expert said we do have expertise in submarines, but not these submarines. We need training for the new submarines.

The original plan was for three of these subs to go to Halifax. One was to go to Esquimalt. First, is that still the plan? If it is the plan, how are we going to service these submarines in Esquimalt if we cannot even service the ones in Halifax?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand where the hon. member gets his information. We have gone through extensive training in the U.K., before we started to bring these boats over. We have worked with the

U.K. royal navy. We have worked with the manufacturer of the boats.

We are providing facilities, buildings and facilities, for these boats in Halifax. In fact we have one of them in dry dock now being repaired. We are also providing similar kinds of facilities over on the west coast so that the plan of having three on the east coast and one on the west coast is still relevant and it is still going to be carried out.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canadian cattle producers are being threatened by tuberculosis being transferred from elk living in our Manitoba national park. If there is one more case of TB before April 2005, Canada will lose its TB free status. Right now in Manitoba there are cases of TB in elk and white tailed deer and investigations involving bison and cattle.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage has failed to properly manage elk residing in the Riding Mountain National Park.

When will the Minister of Canadian Heritage begin to take this problem seriously and reduce this threat by culling the herd in Riding Mountain Park?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would not expect the hon. member to suggest the minister should be culling the herd in Riding Mountain National Park.

What we do is rely on the best science and the best experts we have. We have been working on the issue with the best science and the best minds and in concert with area residents to make sure that whatever remedial action is taken is for the long term life of the elk herd and for the ranchers who may live in the area.

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba and Canada are on the verge of losing their TB-free status in the next month if another outbreak happens. The herd in Manitoba's national park is an endemic carrier of tuberculosis. There is not enough habitat or feed inside the park for the large number of animals the minister is letting run around in the park. We do not want to see the animals eliminated but we sure want to see them reduced.

The minister of agriculture is trying to help farmers. This minister is trying to destroy the livelihood of our farmers and ranchers. She is the mistake.

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reason we asked scientists to carry on this very important work is precisely because it should not be left in the hands of politicians.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

SOCIÉTÉ RADIO-CANADA

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a recent decision by the Human Rights Tribunal has found the Radio-Canada guilty of letting an employee go because of her age, thus confirming the existence of serious problems of discrimination within this corporation.

Is the heritage minister prepared to acknowledge that there is a serious management problem at Radio-Canada and that it is time it stopped?

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour and Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again I repeat, the employees and the employer are at the bargaining table working out a collective agreement.

As for the problems at Radio-Canada the Bloc Québécois has mentioned, these must be brought to the bargaining table and put into a collective agreement. This is where it needs to be dealt with.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, interfering in negotiations is one thing, but having an opinion on major principles is quite another.

How could a government remain unmoved by the fact that there is discrimination pure and simple within a crown corporation, as is the case with Radio-Canada, toward women and young people? I am asking the minister to make a statement on this.

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour and Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat this once more. They have to discuss their problems at the negotiating table. This is why this is the fifth week that staff and management of Radio-Canada have been holding discussions. That is what a collective agreement is all about. That is what a democratic country is all about.

* * *

•(1455)

[English]

CHILD PROTECTION

Mr. Larry Spencer (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, regrettably the B.C. government has decided not to appeal the child pornography case of John Robin Sharpe. The onus now falls squarely on the all too comfortable federal justice minister to address this serious problem.

Since the courts have once again failed to protect children from pedophiles and child pornographers, what immediate steps will the minister take to protect children from sexual predators?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have answered that question many times over the past few days. The member is raising a serious and complex issue. There is no simple solution.

We have Bill C-15A which is pending before the House. Bill C-15A would create new offences with regard to the Internet. It is a step in the right direction. I will say exactly the same thing as the leader of the Alliance Party. We need to get involved in a good

consultation process and we will do that with members of parliament.

Mr. Larry Spencer (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, all we hear is consultation, consultation. After nine years of consultation and fearmongering, Liberal ministers cannot provide Canadians with real solutions.

The Prime Minister is always talking about leaving a legacy. Canadians want to know what kind of legacy he plans to leave with respect to the rights of children. Will the Prime Minister's legacy be one of defending sexual predators or will he now take action to protect Canadian children?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member knew what he was talking about he would know we had Bill C-15A in the House. He would also know that there are provisions in the criminal code with respect to child pornography.

What I have said many times during the past weeks is that the government has been working and will keep on working. We will proceed with a good consultation process involving parliamentarians and we will look at the existing provisions to see if we can add more offences to the criminal code.

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RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Walt Lastewka (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Secretary of State for Science, Research and Development.

The Canadian government has a number of excellent programs which assist small business. One of the best and most cost effective is the industrial research assistance program, IRAP. Due to the success of the program, the funds that are allocated yearly are consistently depleted before the end of the fiscal year.

Given the success of the program in assisting small business, could the Secretary of State for Science, Research and Development inform the House about what measures are being taken to secure additional funding for this most worthwhile program?

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Secretary of State (Science, Research and Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for the excellent work he does on behalf of Canada's small business community. He is right when he says that IRAP is an outstanding program. It serves over 10,000 small businesses and enjoys the support of the small business community across the country.

IRAP is successful, IRAP is effective and, I want to tell the hon. member, IRAP is worth fighting for.

*Business of the House***REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES**

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we have been given to understand that Genome Canada has followed the CIHR in withholding money for experiments on the human embryo no thanks to a health minister who approved the guidelines in the first place, guidelines that pre-empted and offended parliament and the Standing Committee on Health.

Will the government confirm that Genome money has been withdrawn? Why would it allow Genome to make its own rules in the first place?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to the extent to which it is possible to understand the question, I can tell the House that Genome Canada as a condition of funding from the government must comply with the guidelines issued by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research in relation to embryonic stem cell research.

As the House knows, the Minister of Health has already said that she will be tabling legislation in relation to the matter on or before May 10.

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that does not say anything about the money that was allotted last week. The CIHR made funding guidelines because of a legislative void in reproductive technology. The minister admitted to that last week.

In many other areas the government has been adrift in a moral vacuum because we have a minister without the fortitude to introduce legislation. We have had nine years of empty promises.

Will the minister explain why she has not made this a priority? Where is the legislation?

• (1500)

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated on a number of occasions in the House, the government will be responding to the report of the Standing Committee on Health as it relates to assisted human reproduction.

As I have indicated in the House many times, we will both be responding to the report and introducing legislation on or before May 10.

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[*Translation*]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Robert Lanctôt (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago already, a survey on health and limitations condemned the fact that too few people with disabilities were benefiting from the tax credits that were designed for them, because of the unfairly restrictive nature of the definition of the term disabled.

In 1996, people with disabilities again condemned this situation before the task force on persons with disabilities.

What is the government waiting for to review its definition of the term disabled, so that these same people can get the tax credits that are designed for them?

Hon. John McCallum (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not have a specific

answer to the question, but I will inquire and report back to the hon. member as soon as possible.

* * *

[*English*]

HUMAN RESOURCES

Mrs. Judi Longfield (Whitby—Ajax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Secretary of State for International Financial Institutions.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business reports that Canadian owners of small and medium sized businesses are experiencing persistent labour shortages. About 265,000 jobs are vacant in the small business sector and about 185,000 jobs have been unfilled for at least four months.

In a recent survey of its 102,000 members, the federation discovered that 26% reported that they had at least one job that was unfilled because the business was unable to find persons with skills.

What is the government doing to address the situation?

Hon. John McCallum (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Whitby—Ajax for her excellent question.

On the one hand, developing skills and education for workers who are needed by employers lies at the core of our innovation and learning strategy. On the other hand, labour shortages are better than the opposite, which is not enough jobs and too much unemployment. Part of the reason for these labour shortages is that Canada has been the most powerful job creating machine of all the G-7 countries.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Dr. Solomon Isaac Passy, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. John Reynolds (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, could the government House Leader tell us what the business will be for the rest of this week and next week?

As he knows, 70% of members of the House want private members' business to be votable. Will the government House leader instruct his members on the committee to go to the meeting next Tuesday, discuss the issue and vote on it immediately so we can solve the problem as quickly as we can?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow we will continue debate on third reading of Bill C-50, the WTO legislation. When that is concluded we will take up report stage and third reading of Bill C-47 dealing with excise.

On Monday and Tuesday of next week we expect to return to Bill C-5 which deals with species at risk. I would then hope that on Wednesday we could commence debate on the new public safety legislation which I expect to be introduced on Monday.

In response to the Leader of the Opposition on the matter of private members' business, I commend the hon. member for Peterborough who is the chair of the committee on procedure and House affairs. He has taken the initiative to organize under the auspices of the committee a roundtable discussion among members about better alternatives for dealing with private members' business.

As all House leaders know, finding the right way to manage private members' business, particularly the question of votability, is a topic that has bedeviled not just this parliament but previous parliaments. The Leader of the Opposition has suggested everything be votable. That is the rule that applies to government business. If we could come to a consensus about the time that applies to private members' business perhaps we could apply some of the same rules we apply to government business.

As I said during question period, we need creative thinking on the issue. We need a solid co-operative approach. I am perfectly happy to set aside the rhetoric and find ways that will work for all members of parliament.

• (1505)

[Translation]

Mr. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I could not be in the House this morning for routine proceedings and could not table the ninth, tenth, and eleventh reports of the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages. I request the unanimous consent of the House in order to table these reports now.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to revert to tabling of committee reports?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the ninth, tenth, and eleventh reports of the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages.

The ninth report deals with consideration of vote 35.

In its tenth report, the committee expresses the hope that the budget of the official languages commissioner be increased by \$4 million.

In its eleventh report, it expresses the hope that the official languages commissioner will launch a public awareness campaign throughout Canada to help Canadians better understand the Official Languages Act.

Privilege

[English]

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Mississauga South.

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PRIVILEGE

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as you know my request relates to two questions of privilege. If I may, I will deal with one at a time.

The first question of privilege relates to a matter of obstructing or impeding a member of parliament from conducting his business. Mr. Speaker, I would refer you to Marleau and Montpetit, chapter 3, Privileges and Immunities, the section on "Freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation and molestation" on page 83.

The matter relates to an item of which I cannot deal in much specificity because I cannot address the absence of a member in the House. However I believe that dealing with the generic case would provide a remedy to my concern.

As a parliamentary secretary, when called upon, I am obligated to represent the minister in the House of Commons with regard to adjournment proceedings, that is, questions from a previous question period which members would like to deal with in a more fulsome fashion.

It appears that either a member, or the table, or the vacuum of guidelines within the standing orders, has led to a situation not only on the particular occasion in question but on similar occasions where parliamentary secretaries are required to be here in the House to discharge their responsibilities but a member does not show for that proceeding.

It appears to me that the standing orders are silent on the matter of what constitutes due notice in these matters. It also appears to me that the standing orders are silent on what constitutes a valid reason for a cancellation at a very late period of time, what period of notice and what the consequences are if there is no notice or if there is no valid reason for a member not to appear for the adjournment proceedings.

In the particular case, I had other business to attend to but my first responsibilities were to be here in the House to respond at the adjournment proceedings. I was impeded and obstructed from doing my other business in the House simply because the member did not appear for some reason, or the table did not inform me, or that the standing orders of the House did not provide the guidelines in this regard.

I raise this, Mr. Speaker, as a question of privilege. Marleau and Montpetit states on page 84:

Over the years, Members have brought to the attention of the House instances which they believed were attempts to obstruct, impede, interfere, intimidate or molest them.... In a technical sense, such actions are considered to be contempt of the House and not breaches of privilege. Since these matters relate so closely to the right of the House to the services of its Members, they are often considered to be breaches of privilege.

Privilege

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I have risen today on a question of privilege as is sometimes the custom of this place to seek remedy from the House with regard to circumstances where members do not appear, or where notice or cancellation notice, or reasons are not given. I hope that the standing orders will be clarified and that specific instance which involved me will be looked into and resolved to the satisfaction of the House.

• (1510)

The Speaker: I think this question of privilege is very easily dealt with. All hon. members have an obligation to be here for the House when it is sitting, including the hon. member, including the hon. member who apparently did not show up.

The sad thing about the hon. member's question of privilege is that parliamentary secretaries or ministers who choose to be here to respond to questions raised on the late show, as we call it, are here to respond. They cannot say anything unless the person who raised the question is here first.

While I know we try to arrange these things to accommodate all hon. members so that some who may choose to absent themselves from the House, and I know that members hate being away, will be able to in fact slip away and do something else.

In this case there was a breakdown in communication. The member was not here. The hon. member feels he was inconvenienced but I know he was glad to be in the House. In that sense I can only say the burdens of office are heavy upon him. As a parliamentary secretary he has to be here and take a chance. He took a chance and it did not work.

If he has a real grievance, I suggest he raise it with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs which may want to look at the rules in this regard to see if they can be changed.

However I am afraid I cannot agree with him that this non-attendance by another hon. member and the cancellation of this proceeding somehow damaged, affected or impeded his ability to carry out his duties because of course his first duty was to be here in the House. The Chair can only go that far.

The hon. member has a second question of privilege and I know he will want to get on with that.

ALLEGED INTIMIDATION OF MEMBER

Mr. Paul Szabo (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my second question of privilege is a little more serious. The matter of privilege relates to an incident which occurred this morning, in which I believe I was intimidated by another member of parliament with regard to House matters.

If I may give some background, in the debate on Tuesday, April 23 the member for Vancouver Island North sought the unanimous consent of the House to table over 8,000 documents. I was in the House and indicated that I did not give my consent. The next speaker, the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, identified me for refusing to give unanimous consent and indicated that I was silencing Canadians. That is the background.

This morning I was in the House on other business and had to leave the House to go to committee. I left the House and while I was

waiting for the bus outside, a car drove up in front of me. The member for Kelowna got out of the car, approached me, put his finger to my nose and told me that he had a problem with me. He repeated the language the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke had used, indicating that I had silenced Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find that this is intimidation, that the member's intent was to make sure I would think twice before I would exercise my right not to give unanimous consent. Marleau and Montpetit, page 373 with regard to tabling of documents states:

There has been a long-standing practice in the House that private Members may not table documents, official or otherwise, even with the unanimous consent of the House.

I believe that I have worked hard to earn respectful relationships with all hon. members of the House. If I am accused of silencing Canadians and intimidated because I decided to exercise my right to deny unanimous consent on a matter, which I am aware was not permitted by the House in the normal course unless there were extraordinary circumstances which had the consent of all parties of the House in advance of such a request to table, that member was trying to intimidate and influence me into reconsidering my particular actions in the House on a subsequent occasion.

As I indicated in the first question of privilege, normally such items are considered to be matters of contempt of the House, but the House considers them as questions of privilege. I raise them here today simply because I believe that regarding the issue of requesting unanimous consent to table documents which are not in accordance with the rules of the House except in some rare circumstances, it is not for another member to suggest to me that I should not be making up rules as I go along, it is the Speaker. Those were the allegations of the member, that I was somehow making up rules, but when I get a finger in my face to suggest that he has a problem with me, I take that with the aggression which accompanied those words and that action, that I was being intimidated.

I raise this matter with the hon. Speaker for his consideration.

• (1515)

The Speaker: We will hear first from the hon. member for Vancouver Island North, as he was making the speech and made the request.

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, if you will recall the events of Tuesday, I brought in the things I wanted to table. I had 8,681 letters. I was summoned to speak to you by the clerk. I told you my intention. You clearly told me that the piles were too high and I reduced the size of the piles. You were aware that I intended to ask for unanimous consent to table those documents and the advice I received from my leader's office was that it was perfectly in order. I thought that you had indicated to me that as long as I received unanimous consent from the House, it would be appropriate.

I missed some of the intervention by the member for Mississauga South. If he is suggesting that I was in any way trying to intimidate him, I am not sure how that is. I have not spoken to the member since that incident. I did recognize that he was the member who had denied unanimous consent and I said so in a subsequent press release. That is the only action I have taken since that time.

Privilege

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify if the hon. member across the way is talking about the member for Kelowna who is not in the House, in which case it makes it difficult for him to defend himself. I was wondering whether we are talking about my hon. colleague who just stood up or the member for Kelowna.

The Speaker: I think there were two members that were mentioned, the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke and the member for Kelowna who the hon. member for Mississauga South says somehow intimidated him in the performance of his duties.

I think what is clear is that what happened here is a perfectly normal practice. The hon. member for Vancouver Island North asked consent to table documents. The consent was refused as sometimes happens but not always. Somebody pointed out who made the refusal and did so in a way that apparently caused some offence to the hon. member for Mississauga South.

As the Speaker, I am not in a position to control what goes on outside the House. What went on in the House in this case was perfectly normal. It is not uncommon for this to happen.

I am sorry that the hon. member for Mississauga South feels that somehow he has been maligned by the statements of the other hon. members, but it is normal for consent to be requested and it even happens that consent is refused sometimes. It happened in this case. It has happened in many cases in my experience here over a number of years and sometimes people point out who said it. There is not a lot I can do about that.

In the circumstances, I have trouble with the hon. member suggesting that somehow he has been intimidated. If something happened outside the House that involved the member for Kelowna coming up to him and putting his finger on his nose, that could be an assault but I do not know how I can deal with it here in the House. This is my concern because I do not think it has breached his privileges to any extent.

Had there been perhaps a more serious assault, I would be inclined to regard it as something more serious in that regard, but then if it happened outside the House I am not sure what jurisdiction your poor Speaker would have in respect of such an incident.

I will hear the hon. member very briefly, but I think we have pretty well exhausted this point.

• (1520)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, again I cite Marleau and Montpetit under “Freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation and molestation”. On page 83 it mentions whether it happens in the House or while coming or going to or from the House on account of parliamentary proceedings. I was on my way to the transport committee.

I have sought legal advice on the matter. The action of approaching a member quickly and with a finger pointing in the face in fact constitutes assault under the legal definition. The member repeated the language that I was silencing Canadians and was trying to influence my actions in the future, or any member who is trying to exercise his or her right to deny unanimous consent.

The rules say clearly that in the majority of cases unanimous consent to table documents by private members is not permitted. It is my contention that I was assaulted by the member for Kelowna this morning and that he was trying to intimidate me in my actions as a member of parliament.

The Speaker: The hon. member may have a point. What we will do is put the matter over and perhaps when the hon. member for Kelowna is back he can shed some further light on this matter.

I have one other question. Could the hon. member inform the House if this happen outside the building?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Waiting for the bus, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you for that clarification. We will leave it and see if there are further submissions on the point at a later date.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, Canadian Alliance): I just want to inform you, Mr. Speaker, that the member for Kelowna, the Canadian Alliance critic for seniors, is on his way to the House. I am sure he would like an opportunity to answer these charges; while we are waiting for the bus. I am sure the bus is on its way and it will no doubt bring the member for Kelowna, who I hope finds his way here without undue assault.

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, after you gave your ruling, I felt that there was disrespect toward me in the House because the member for Mississauga South was smirking and smiling. He is trying to put across a serious incident, but by his smiling and smirking in the House he obviously does not think it is serious.

• (1525)

The Speaker: We cannot control the facial expressions of all hon. members.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, the offer has been made by the members of the Canadian Alliance to have the member appear in the House and speak to what is in my opinion a very serious matter. It really does not behoove any member in the House to suggest that the member for Mississauga South was smirking because he was not. He approached us and certainly he takes this issue very seriously.

As well, I think it behoves the Chair to note, as he does, that the Speaker is responsible for the precinct of parliament which is more than simply the boundaries of the House of Commons. It includes and incorporates the buildings and the grounds outside.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, you do have a responsibility, and I believe the member has an equal opportunity now to have a ruling on this issue.

The Speaker: The Chair appreciates the assistance of the hon. member for Brandon—Souris. I am sure he knows, as well as the Chair does, that unfortunately the Speaker's authority for the precinct only extends to the interior of the buildings occupied by parliament and not to the lawn or the buses. This is what concerns me and that is why I asked where this happened. However I am sure we will hear in due course from the hon. member for Kelowna.

*Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

M. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I was in the middle of my speech before question period, I was talking about a report that KPMG had presented to show Canada to be a low cost leader among industrial nations. I went through the various sectors to show where Canada was leading.

We are certainly concerned whenever there are job losses but we are not about to give up hope for the future. It is a hard economic reality that companies like General Motors have to make products they can sell. They do not earn enough to survive if no one buys the types of cars they produce.

When General Motors announced the closure, it stated very clearly that the reasons were the overcapacity in the industry and the declining sales of the sports cars made at Sainte-Thérèse. It decided it had to restructure its North American operations.

Contrary to allegations made in a recent newspaper article, entitled "Driving Production Down Mexico Way", a joint study by the federal and Ontario governments shows that the Mexican expansion has not come at Canada's expense.

Canada is still the fifth largest auto producer in the world. As we all know, the automobile industry, as with every other industry, is still adjusting to the general economic slowdown. Companies are restructuring their national and global operations. That could mean plant closures not just here but in the United States and in other parts of the world as well. We are not alone.

Nevertheless, the government has made a commitment to continue to work with the industry, with the unions and with other levels of government to encourage their automobile companies to keep their plants open and running.

Let us not forget that despite these setbacks we still have a very strong automobile sector. It directly employs 150,000 people and accounts for upward of \$73 billion in annual shipments. It continues to be a major driver of the Canadian economy. Ensuring its continued growth and well-being continues to be a top government priority.

The auto industry invests in Canada because we have a highly skilled workforce, competitive labour costs and an excellent business climate in which it can thrive. We all hope that as the North American economy makes steady improvements we will be successful in retaining a major share of auto production in North America.

While we all share the concern of the party opposite for the people who are affected by the closure of this plant, we will remain positive. We believe the industry has a good solid future in that province. I for one will continue to support the efforts of the government to help ensure that industry continues to grow and continues to be a strong and vibrant part of Quebec and Canada's economy.

● (1530)

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Yukon for his remarks. He comes from a very special region with a very specific economy.

He said that the federal government is looking after this issue and is doing its job. A request has been made. We now have a coalition under the chairmanship of Mr. Poirier, the mayor of Boisbriand. The federal government has promised him, in October last year, to send two lobbyists and one administrator.

Six months have gone by, we are in April, and the government still has not done anything. Yet, I am told that the federal government is looking after this problem, that it is taking care of our business, but cannot even appoint two lobbyists and one administrator. This is mind boggling.

What is going on right now is wrong. I would like the hon. member to comment.

[English]

Mr. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure of the details of that request but the federal government has been quite involved from the beginning. I might have mentioned this in my remarks, but when the plant originally closed, the federal government worked closely with the mayor of Boisbriand and the committee to keep the plant in operation and to save jobs. It actually made a financial contribution to the committee and participated in that committee.

On a number of occasions the government also went to negotiations and led negotiations at the GM headquarters in Detroit. The various ministers, Manley, Tobin and Cauchon, went to that head office and tried to convince them to keep the plant open. Also the new Minister of Industry, Minister Rock, has met with the—

The Deputy Speaker: I have already interceded on this matter with other members in terms of referring to one another in the House. Please refer to each other as the name of your ridings or the portfolio for which the member or minister might be responsible for.

Mr. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry I slipped there in my enthusiasm on this topic. The Minister of Industry has met with the president of GM Canada and recently appointed the associate deputy minister to be on the committee of the Quebec industry minister committee on this subject. That associate deputy minister actually met with the mayor of Boisbriand this morning.

In relation to the particular event, I am not aware of it. Perhaps we could have been more or less helpful, but we certainly have been involved in a large number of ways.

The best way to make a positive debate out of this is to admit those interventions, and perhaps as the intervenor suggested, and try to do more. Positive suggestions as to how we can do more is good, and hopefully we can all work together. I am sure everyone in the House would love to see that plant open and see the continuation of the other parts plants in Quebec which are successful in the new ways they participate in the automotive industry.

Supply

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member for Yukon a question about the present state of the auto industry in Ontario. In the last 18 months the CAW has lost approximately 15,000 auto-related members as the industry restructures. Plant closures have been announced by GM in Quebec and by Ford at its Oakville truck plant. There are also concerns about the future of DaimlerChrysler's Pillette Road truck plant in Windsor. At the same time auto parts plants have also been hit hard in southern Ontario.

What is the government doing to stem the tide of jobs in Windsor and Oakville? What is the government doing to work on a new auto industry strategy for Canada?

Mr. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, indeed, it is not just Quebec that is having problems in the auto industry. As the member very carefully pointed out, this economic downturn and restructuring has affected the auto industry in the whole country.

I am not sure if the member is aware, but the Minister of Industry has started to undertake consultations with the auto industry to develop and see what can be done on a new policy to help the industry in general, not just in Quebec but in Ontario and in other places where there are problems.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to expand on what the hon. member for Yukon just stated. He said: "There will be meetings with representatives of the auto industry where we will discuss what we can do to help the auto industry develop not only in Boisbriand, Quebec, but also across Canada".

There lies the problem. Representatives of the auto industry who meet with officials of the Government of Canada have requests to submit to the government. They want additional tax credits. The federal government might have in its hands the lever it needs to force GM to do something for the Boisbriand workers since it is very well known that GM is interested in reintroducing the GTO model that had been produced at the Boisbriand plant.

Why not make it again in Boisbriand? I would like the member to comment on that aspect of the issue. Why does the federal government not use these requests by the auto industry to put pressure in order to incite, encourage or even force them to keep the Boisbriand plant in operation?

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I enjoy working with this member on committees. He has a great deal of insight. If the plant wants to reproduce a product, I agree it would be excellent if it did it in its own plant. Members of the Bloc, the Parti Québécois and the Quebec government are on the committee to keep the plant in operation. They could come up with solutions or committee of the Quebec minister's industry on which our associate deputy minister participates could come up with solutions.

It is good that we are talking about positive solutions. If they come up with recommendations, hopefully the industry minister will look at them or any other suggestions to solve this problem.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to speak to the motion put forward by the hon. member for Laurentides. I will read the motion so that people listening understand where we are in the debate. The motion says:

That this House condemn the government for its inability to defend the workers at the General Motors plant in Boisbriand and thus allowing the vehicle assembly sector of the Quebec auto industry to disappear.

All the words in the motion were very well weighed. The reality that has existed for a very long time in Canada is that the auto industry has developed for a large part in Ontario through choices, through aid provided and through the Auto Pact. For many years, a few decades ago, Quebec has sought to get the auto industry to come to its territory.

We managed to attract General Motors. We tried to attract others. The General Motors plant has been very efficient, productive and economically viable. Thanks to the quality of its manpower, it has been doing a good job. As a matter of fact, the company did not decide to close the plant because of a lack of productivity. This is typical of choices multinationals are making these days. It takes not only a good rate of return in every plant, but the best rate of return. It is a company decision.

For our part, we, as the federal parliament, have the responsibility to ensure that the federal government has done everything it could to give a chance to the industry, keep the plant going, and find a use for the equipment. It would be a crying shame if, come the fall of 2002, we were to lose this business, this plant, the only one of its size in Quebec in the auto industry, causing us to go back to the situation we were in 20 years ago.

The reason we brought this debate to the floor of the House today is that the federal government has been dragging its feet in this issue.

I will read a few quotes from the Minister of Justice who was then secretary of state in charge of regional economic development for Quebec. The first quote is from September 7, 2001. Talking about the crisis to get the plant going again, the minister, who is now the minister responsible for Quebec, said, "I cannot see which federal programs could be used to this end". This was in September 2001.

This same minister then said "There might be Technology Partnerships Canada, a program used by the government to support Bombardier for over a decade, but we would have to see".

Finally, until today, the federal government has done nothing to try to prevent the closing of these plants. This is why we brought this debate to the floor of the House. The federal government has not done its job in this area.

My colleague from Laurentides said it earlier, and I will say it again because it is important. Mr. Poirier, the mayor of Boisbriand, who heads the coalition to get the plant going again, told us that since October, for close to six months now, they have been waiting for the appointment of two lobbyists and one administrative representative to ensure that the right steps are taken to get some kind of a commitment from the company. We have not yet heard from the federal government.

Supply

Meanwhile, the Government of Quebec has offered a guarantee for a \$360 million loan. This was done by a government that is very conscious of the need to ensure that the Boisbriand plant remains open. As for the federal government, it seems to have other interests regarding this issue.

We heard members from several parties say that it is not only in Quebec that the auto industry is in difficulty. The problem is that this is the last plant that we have in Quebec, and it is crucial for us. If there is a need to help the whole auto industry, then do it. However, action must be taken now with regard to the current crisis, because the plant will not be closing in ten years, but in the fall of 2002.

An hon. member: In September.

Mr. Paul Crête: In September 2002.

Until then, for those workers who are affected, for those people who have spent their life working at the plant, for the economy of the region and of the whole of Quebec, it is important that action be taken.

The first move should come from the federal government. It should say, "Yes, we have people dealing with this issue. Yes, they will be able to travel. Yes, they will ask the right questions to GM executives, when they meet with them at their headquarters".

Why would the Prime Minister and the ministers responsible not act and go to meet with GM's senior management? If they sent Team Canada missions to China to discover new markets, why would they not do similar things here, in Quebec, in Canada and in the United States, to maintain markets that we have already developed, to save a plant where workers have all the skills required to do the job?

● (1540)

My concern is that this plant is somewhat a bridgehead of the auto industry in Quebec. Here is a very concrete example. In my riding, which is quite far from Laurentides, there is a company called AMT that manufactures auto parts for different manufacturers. If we lose the main manufacturer in Quebec, this will reduce circulation channels and access opportunities to those markets. In order to have access to markets, it is very important to be able to use all the necessary networks. We are very concerned. How will we find solutions? We do not really know.

I think that pleas have also been made by concerned unions. Allow me to quote, among others, Mr. Desnoyers who said: "The Prime Minister of Canada has not lifted a finger about this issue. It is time that he dealt with it personally. He will hear from us often". This was a release from the FTQ dated January 25 2002.

This means that this plea has not yet been heard by the Prime Minister. Will this government not take position to show that it wants the plant to remain open, people to have jobs in that plant, and look at possible solutions?

The government has taken no initiative. It seems that the neoliberalism that is its trademark since 1994 finds its roots in a issue such as this. They decided to leave it to the marketplace rule. Even if the government gave a loan to General Motors and even if the state has contributed significantly in several ways to support the company, today this multinational has decided to close its plant in

Quebec and the government does nothing about it. We will have to live with a situation that will bring about a loss of jobs, expertise and a whole distribution and manufacturing network. It is a great shame.

The union has shown a lot of maturity in this matter. They avoided taking drastic measures that would have had a very negative impact on the company. If the federal government does not take the necessary measures, people will get desperate. It is almost too much to tolerate.

People are angry because of the federal government's lack of action and the lack of initiatives. There are no plans to develop hypotheses, to find solutions and alternatives. We see no such thing at this time and it is linked to the Quebec economy as a whole.

Tomorrow's car will be dependent on aluminum. It will be made out of new metals that are not in use today, but that are available in Quebec. They will be part of tomorrow's car. If we do not have that type of plant to develop these new products and to put our resources to that use, we will lose a great advantage and the federal government will have missed the boat. It will have shirked its responsibilities. It will have accumulated surpluses but, at the same time, it will have contributed to the death of a business in a region where it has considerable economic impact.

We are now facing that reality. I hope today's Bloc Québécois opposition day will produce some results and bring the federal government to some kind of action in order that we can revive that plant. We must hope that in one, two or three years the situation will be back to normal and people will be proud to continue to work there. As all other members of the Bloc Québécois, I ask the cooperation of the House so that we can get the government to take measures in that regard.

I will now let the member for Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, who is sharing the time I have after the question and comment period following my speech, have the floor.

● (1545)

[English]

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Mr. Speaker, on a number of occasions today I raised the question of intellectual honesty in this debate. I know this agitates the Bloc members but the reality out there is that investment gets very nervous when it is looking at a province headed by a separatist. In other words, what confidence would that sort of uncertainty give a company in terms of investing in the province of Quebec?

What the Bloc members want is the best of both worlds. They want to play at this idea of separatism but the citizens back in Quebec are paying a heavy price for this fixation on separation. We know that because the reality is that if Quebec did indeed separate, would General Motors of Canada have any guarantee that this new country called Quebec would have a free trade agreement with our biggest trading neighbours, the Americans? What about the old auto pact? Where would that be? In terms of the North American Free Trade Agreement, would Quebec in fact have one?

We could also talk about currency. Those are all considerations that every corporation, big or small, take into consideration. Every economist will tell us that, even those based in Quebec. That is why the head offices of a lot of corporate entities and corporate citizens have fled Quebec.

The fact remains that if we had a choice between that jurisdiction and another one, would we not choose the jurisdiction with more political stability than the province of Quebec represented here in the House of Commons by separatists?

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, investors may be nervous, but I think some members here are getting a little too nervous.

Seriously, let us consider the investments made in Quebec in the last few years. There has been a sovereignist government in Quebec not for the last two weeks, but for the last several years. In fact, so far, we have had two sovereignist governments.

Alcan decided to invest not millions but billions of dollars on the north shore. Bombardier has developed a major aerospace industrial complex, and its board members are not known as sovereignists. Federalists have determined that Montreal would be a great location because of its huge workforce. The best water in the world can be found in the city of Amos, in Abitibi. Do you think that people considered not investing there because they are sovereignists? An Italian corporation has decided to move there to develop that market.

I can also tell the House that I have a Geo Metro, that is a very small car made by General Motors. When I went to buy it, the car dealer—a rather well-known federalist—did not tell me, “I am not selling you that car, because you are a sovereignist”. He sold me the car.

What we are talking about here is the economy, the markets. We are not talking about the separation of Quebec or the Constitution, but rather about the government's inaction on this issue. We are making a heartfelt appeal today, because the government has not done its job. It has not sent the much needed lobbyists to talk to General Motors. It has not done all it should have done, because, in its mind, the auto industry belongs in Ontario and it is just a fluke that one plant is operating in Quebec.

This is totally unacceptable. It is not a fluke. I have not seen many Liberal members from Quebec stand up today to say that this plant closure does not make any sense. This is what the debate is all about; a plant providing more than 1,000 jobs is about to close, and we are still waiting for the federal government to do something to ensure it stays open.

• (1550)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the cassette has obviously been stuck in the machine since this morning. He cannot get rid of it.

It is really unfortunate because I believe that my colleague from Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques has made it very clear that the economic development of Quebec has been phenomenal in the last years. Montreal has once again become a hub in the North American economy.

Privilege

I think that this argument cannot be used any more, especially since I remember that in 1995, Laurent Beaudoin, then President of Bombardier, playing on this very issue of instability, had opened a plant in Northern Ireland a few weeks or a few months earlier.

Mr. Paul Crête: Briefly Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Justice, who is from Quebec, and who is the federal government's spokesman for Quebec, when he will do what has to be done?

There is an emergency situation to tackle here. For the moment, he is not saying a word. This is not acceptable.

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, I will hear a point of order on a question of privilege raised earlier today.

The member for Kelowna.

* * *

[English]

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED INTIMIDATION OF MEMBER

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I understand you were expecting me after the question of privilege was raised earlier today. I want to give you and the House my best recollection of what actually happened. I did not hear the question of privilege because I was on the bus going back to my office.

It seems to me that for some reason or another a member from the other side of the House felt that I had assaulted or intimidated him. At least that is what I have been told. I assure you, Mr. Speaker, and the member that absolutely nothing like that took place. I can say exactly what happened to the best of my recollection.

I was standing in front of the Centre Block of the Parliament Buildings waiting for the green bus to go to my office in the Justice building. As I was standing there, the hon. member for Mississauga South, who apparently raised the question of privilege earlier, came up from behind me.

I told him I had a contention to raise with him. He asked what it was. I said that it had to do with his refusal to give unanimous consent for the hon. member for Vancouver Island North to table a letter in the House. He said that it could not be allowed because the letter was not in both official languages. I told him that it was not his decision but that of the Speaker whether or not the document could be tabled. I said to him that he had not even seen the letter.

I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the letter had to do with the subject that was debated that day. It comes from a group of over 8,000 Chinese people. The letter was written to the justice minister of Canada. The translation of the letter reads:

Supply

Dear Justice Minister of Canada:

Re: Raising the Age of Sex Consent to Eighteen

I am shocked to hear that the age of consent for sexual activity is 14 years of age. That means adults can legally be having sex with children. Given the emotional vulnerability of children and the great potential for harm from sexual activity, I am very concerned.

I understand that the provincial governments have asked you to raise the age of consent to help combat child prostitution and sexual exploitation.

Canadians do not vote, consume alcohol, fight wars or engage in other adult activities legally until age 18. Sexual activity is an activity with adult consequences, including disease and pregnancy.

For the sake of Canada's children, I respectfully urge you to act immediately by enacting and supporting legislation to protect children and restore the age of consent back to 18 years of age.

That was the letter and unanimous consent was denied by the hon. member for Mississauga South. The allegation has nothing to do with that particular part but that was the disagreement between the hon. member and myself, and I expressed it to that degree.

The hon. member has suggested that I stepped out of a car into his way and put my finger in his nose, or something like that. There was absolutely nothing of the kind. I was not in a car to begin with. I was standing on the sidewalk waiting to get on the bus. He came in later. I believe there was at least one other member, I believe it was the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, who passed by as the member for Mississauga South and I were talking.

If this is the kind of thing that is supposed to be a serious question of privilege, I do not understand it. There was no assault or intimidation involved. There was disagreement involved, absolutely, and there still is but that is not the contention. The issue is that I am being charged with having done something that I did not do. I deny it totally. I do not understand where this is coming from at all.

•(1555)

The Deputy Speaker: Let me thank the hon. member for Kelowna for coming back to the House at the first possible opportunity and particularly thank him for his clarification. The Speaker himself heard the earlier intervention by the hon. member for Mississauga South and I am sure this matter will be taken under deliberation and if it is necessary the Speaker will report back to the House.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I take part today in this debate on an opposition motion, more specifically a Bloc Québécois motion, on the vehicle assembly sector of the auto industry in Quebec, and more particularly on the inability of the federal government to defend the workers at the GM plant.

I will repeat, for those who are watching us and for all parliamentarians, what the motion says. It reads as follows:

That this House condemn the government for its inability to defend the workers at the General Motors plant in Boisbriand and thus allowing the vehicle assembly sector of the Quebec auto industry to disappear.

For Quebec, the GM plant is an important symbol of the lack of investment in the Quebec auto industry by the federal government in the past. It is also a telling example of its inability to support workers in a key industry.

In the next few minutes, I will try to show how the federal government, through its inaction, its lack of support and its unwillingness to help GM and its workers, has abandoned what was left of the auto industry in Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois wholeheartedly supports the Fédération des travailleurs du Québec and its affiliate, the Canadian Auto Workers, the CAW, in their struggle to save the GM plant in Boisbriand.

Of course, we are very pleased to support the workers because at issue is not only significant job losses that will affect them, but also the economy in the whole area and in the surrounding towns, which will also suffer as a result.

Obviously, the closing of the GM plant will have an impact on the workers. However, it will also have an impact in terms of significant job losses in all of the surrounding communities, whether it be Boisbriand, Saint-Eustache and many others. So, our support goes out first to the FTQ, but equally to everyone who has benefited from GM's operations over the years.

There is a major risk that the Boisbriand assembly plant will be closed. This will cause 1,400 direct job losses and some 9,000 indirect job losses among subcontractors, including GM suppliers in Beauce, the Outaouais, the Eastern Townships and southwest Montreal, which may be shut down. Not only will the area in which GM is located be affected, but also regions like the Outaouais and Beauce.

I want to deal specifically with southwest Montreal. At a time when workers may lose their jobs at Alstom in the east end of Montreal, in the riding of Verdun, we are once again putting a subregion, an part of Montreal, in an equally uncertain situation, because of the closing of the GM plant. Consequently, we must look at the effects throughout the region of Laurentides-Lanaudière, but also look at the impact on the other regions of Quebec.

I remind the House that the plant in Boisbriand built 75,000 vehicles in 2000, or 7.75% of all vehicles built in Canada. The plant was even cited as an example of excellence for all the other GM plants.

So the closing of the GM plant has nothing to do with poor performance and productivity on the part of its workers and the plant itself, but has to do with choices made by the federal government and its direct inaction, with the lack of determination and seriousness on the part of the then secretary of state for the economic development of Quebec. It also has to do with the failure to appoint, as my colleagues indicated earlier, lobbyists to find a sustainable solution to the problem now facing the workers.

Supply

•(1600)

Must we remind the House that Canada has always greatly benefited from investment in the auto industry. However, not a single dollar was announced for Quebec during the first six months of 2001. During the previous two quarters, Ontario was second only to the United States in terms of investment per country. Various investments of several hundreds millions of dollars were announced, particularly by General Motors in Oshawa, by Chrysler in Windsor, and by Toyota in Cambridge.

Thus, there were major investments in the rest of Canada, particularly in Ontario. But very recently, very few investments were made in Quebec. While GM is the last symbol of the auto industry in Quebec, we think it is time that a for the federal government to take action, not only to support these workers, but also to support the area's economy and to stimulate it.

The closing of this plant will have an impact not only on the Laurentides-Lanaudière region, but also on other regions in Quebec, as I said earlier.

The GM plant in Boisbriand will close in September 2002. The immediate impact of this closing will be tremendous. Fourteen hundred highly paid jobs will be lost in Boisbriand, Blainville, Sainte-Thérèse and Saint-Eustache, where most of GM's workers live. Moreover, this closing could mean the loss of 4,700 more jobs in the auto parts sector.

The estimates of jobs created by the spending of auto workers fluctuate, but a conservative analysis indicates that 9,000 indirect jobs depend on the plant. The closing of the plant in Boisbriand would entail the loss of at least 10,000 jobs in Quebec. That would crush the efforts made by Quebec to create jobs these last few years. As I have already said, Quebec would lose its only car assembly plant.

I wish to remind the House that the arrival of GM in Boisbriand had led us to hope—and I say hope because, at present, the results are not conclusive—that Quebec would at long last have its fair share of America's fetish industry. In the Basses-Laurentides region, no other job offered the same good terms for someone who had only a grade 12 education, and that was frequent at the time.

Also, the FTQ unanimously adopted a motion in November 2001. It was a resolution supporting the 1,400 GM workers. This resolution could very well be taken up by the House. It asks:

That the governments of Quebec and Canada again be asked to convince GM Canada to make a major investment in Boisbriand, so that Quebec can keep its fair share of the auto industry.

As the Chair is indicating that my ten minutes are almost up, I will conclude my remarks. Between 1964 and 2001, in Quebec, the auto industry's share increased from 3 to 5%. More than ever, we believe that efforts must be made by the federal government to ensure that we will keep this last symbol of Quebec's auto industry.

•(1605)

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Madam Speaker, we are debating a very important issue, which should also be of great interest for the workers of Quebec. Sometimes, I wonder if the people across the way are listening; we have to say things over and over to get our point across.

My colleague from Rosemont—Petite-Patrie quoted some figures. Does he know that Quebec buys between 25% and 28% of all automobiles in Canada? Quebec also buys 28% of all auto parts used in Canada. Quebec builds slightly less than 5% of the automobiles and barely 3% of all auto parts made in Canada.

We have a plant in Boisbriand that is economically viable, we have skilled workers, we have a union which is ready to do everything necessary for the plant to stay open and which is flexible on the social justice front. When I hear such petty comments as those a Tory colleague made earlier, it makes me very sad.

From a social justice point of view, I think it would be normal for the federal government and the Quebec government to press the case in order that a minimum percentage of the automobiles bought in Quebec be built in Quebec, especially since we are among the most skilled workers in the industry. It is clear that the Boisbriand workers have a good reputation within the company. It is clear that these people are doing their duty.

From a social justice standpoint, I would like my colleague to tell me what he thinks of the fact that, not only do we not have our fair share of the industry, but we are about to give up the small share we have, which gives us hope for a better future in that area.

•(1610)

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Madam Speaker, my colleague is referring to the real imbalance that currently exists. We could talk about many activity sectors, but in the case of the auto industry, we know that in Ontario it has developed at the expense of Quebec.

In 1965, when the auto pact was signed between Canada and the United States, the Canadian politicians made a commitment to expanding the auto industry in Quebec. We have no choice but to conclude that this is not what happened. Between 1964 and 2001, the share of the auto industry in Quebec has increased from 3 to 5%. This is a complete failure.

The proof, and my colleague has talked about it, is that 25% of all automobiles are sold in Quebec while Quebec only accounts for 3% of the jobs in assembly and 5% of the jobs in manufacturing.

This is far from being an equalization mechanism. Quebec is not getting its fair share in the projects and in structuring jobs, as the recovery of the GM plant could be, by building new models of vehicles.

[English]

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Madam Speaker, I would like to make a couple of points. Number one is that the workers in Quebec are extremely good workers. As we all know, that automobile plant has been around for 37 years. Although we know it is closing it has nothing to do with the quality of the plant.

Supply

I have made some points in terms of the political instability caused by the separatist notion in Quebec. However, beyond that, one of the points of similarity I want to make in relation to Atlantic Canada is that our shipbuilding industry has also been deserted by the Government of Canada. Prior to the last election the former minister of industry, Mr. Tobin, went to New Brunswick and promised just about the world in terms of restructuring, helping the industry, the letting of contracts and so on and so forth.

I do believe the federal government has a responsibility to all parts of Canada. It has to ensure that these workers get a fair deal. It has a lot to do in terms of regional disparity. We would like to see some action on this file.

I hope the government does recognize that some intellectual honesty in this debate has to be exercised in terms of that political instability.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Madam Speaker, I think that throughout today's debate, we have demonstrated intellectual rigour and not intellectual dishonesty, as the member demonstrated today in the House.

This was nothing but low demagoguery. I urge him to tell the GM workers what he has told us today. We will see who is really responsible today for the closing of the GM plant.

• (1615)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I would ask members to be careful of the language that is starting to be used in the House.

[English]

Mr. Steve Mahoney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this particular issue. I find myself in agreement with one of the questioners from the Progressive Conservative Party when he said that the Bloc Quebecois will have to forgive us on this side of the House and those in other parties if we are perhaps a little suspicious when a Bloc opposition day motion comes before this place suggesting that the province of Quebec is hard done by in relation to other provinces in the country. We are somewhat suspicious that perhaps there is another agenda involved in the motion.

During my five years in this place, while travelling with committees both in Canada and abroad, I have been pleasantly surprised by the work ethic and the attitude of many members of the Bloc Quebecois. I say that save and except for the one issue that drives virtually everything that the party stands for, which is the separation of the province of Quebec and the creation of its own country separate and distinct from Canada.

Unfortunately, when we read a motion that might simply call for assistance to a particular industrial sector in a particular part of the country, we find ourselves reading between the lines. That point was well made during the question and answer session, and it is bound to colour the debate in this place. However I will not let that happen, at least from my perspective. I will simply point out some facts.

To suggest, as the previous speaker said, that the auto industry in Quebec has suffered at the hands of the auto industry in Ontario, is

patently false. In fact there may well be an argument that people who decided to invest in new auto plants in places like Cambridge or Alliston in the province of Ontario, may have considered going to Quebec at some time if there had been a better atmosphere of stability in the political life in that province.

No one questions the quality of the workers. No one questions the quality of the community life. What investors look for when they want to invest in a particular location is the likelihood for stability. What we have seen in the province of Quebec, particularly over the past couple of years, is a complete lack of interest in the agenda put forward by the Parti Quebecois in the province of Quebec and the Bloc Quebecois here in the House of Commons.

Quebecers, by and large, tell us in poll after poll, in meeting after meeting, in riding after riding and in byelection after byelection that they are not interested in that agenda. They want the same thing every other Canadian wants. They want a job with some security. They want a community where they feel safe. They want good quality education for their children. They want good quality health care. They also want a future as part of this great nation of Canada.

Let me share with the House some statistics in relation to the overall economy in this country. When things go into recession, provincial governments will often blame the federal government. However, when things go well, those same provincial governments tend to take credit for the economic boom and growth that is going on. It has nothing to do with federal policies. It has nothing to do with the largest tax cut in the history of this nation of \$100 million. Might that fuel some economic activity in every province, including Quebec?

• (1620)

It has nothing to do with low interest rates, and yet when those provincial governments or certain interest groups in the provinces get nervous they might want us to raise or lower interest rates or artificially raise the dollar or do all of these gerrymandering activities of social interference on behalf of the government to somehow affect the economy.

We cannot take credit unilaterally as a federal government because this is a federation built on partnership. I would admit that when jobs increase in every part of the country it has as much to do with the policies of the provincial and municipal governments, the boards of trade, chambers of commerce, union halls and the construction industry. It has as much to do with all of that as it does with the federal government, but clearly the federal government has a role in setting the tone: balancing our budget eight years in a row; delivering unheard of surpluses on a consistent annual basis; and showing the kind of fiscal responsibility and leadership that give confidence to business to invest in the country. We constantly hear people opposite say that we are losing investment to the United States. The fact is that we are gaining investment from all over the world. People from every part of the world look at Canada and say what a marvelous place it is.

Supply

I recently travelled with our immigration committee to Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong and was very interested to note that the province of Quebec has offices in the same building, indeed, in a couple of cases on the same floor, as the Government of Canada. They work together on looking for economic opportunities. In some parts of the world, offices of the province of Ontario can be found, not everywhere, but I see Quebec offices virtually everywhere. Offices for the province of British Columbia can be found in some parts of the world. Again they are not everywhere, but I see Quebec offices everywhere. They are working co-operatively.

It might come as a surprise to the residents in the province of Quebec and the constituents of the hon. members opposite in the Bloc Québécois that the people in those offices for Quebec work extremely well with their counterparts from the federal government. In fact they will say openly that they have the same goal, which is to bring investment, job growth and prosperity to Canada. Of course their interests are primarily directed at the people who employ them, their employers being the governments of the provinces of Quebec or Ontario or Alberta or British Columbia, but it is very much a hand in glove relationship and it is extremely positive.

I do not want to go on about the issue of separation, but I would add that if that particular dog were allowed to hunt we would lose that kind of relationship, I think, tragically and unfortunately. I should say as an aside that Premier Landry might be interested to know that his officer in the office in Shanghai presented us with a beautiful book on Quebec. When I opened it up there was a loose photograph of the premier, except that it was a photograph of Lucien Bouchard, not Premier Landry. I questioned the individual because I found it somewhat odd that there would be a photograph of a former premier in a document that they are handing out to anyone who visits. Hopefully that will change, because I think it is important that the individual in that office promote the province of Quebec as a place of investment with the current premier and government in place.

Let me share some job numbers, if I may. Retail and wholesale employers hired 18,000 more workers in March, bringing year over year growth to 4.1% since March 2001. Believe me, Quebec shared in that. Employment in agriculture grew by 12,000 jobs in March. More than half the increase was concentrated in Quebec, for over 7,000 jobs, likely influenced, I will admit, by unusually mild weather in addition to the policies of the government and of the province of Quebec in working co-operatively.

• (1625)

Quebec leads all employment growth across the country. Does that happen as a result of neglect by the federal government? I think not. I think the federal government must have some influence, something to say in addition to the efforts of the province, the municipalities and the businesses. I will again give some figures. Employment in Quebec was up 32,000 jobs in March, bringing year to date gains to 69,000. The unemployment rate fell 0.4 percentage points to 8.9%. I will admit that 8.9% unemployment is too high and we have to work with our partners in Quebec, that is, the government of Quebec, the businesses, the voters, the people who live in Quebec, to try to get that figure down.

In Ontario, as an example, to compare to the 32,000 jobs in March in the province of Quebec, employment rose by 17,000, bringing gains from the start of the year to 44,000. In British Columbia, employment was up by 11,000 jobs in March. In Alberta, 11,000 jobs fully offset a decrease it had gone through in the month of February.

Yet we do not hear people from the province of Alberta saying that they are being ignored at the expense of helping Ontario. I think their credibility would be stretched to say so. It is just nonsense. What we have in Ontario is a climate that welcomes business, that creates jobs. Again, it is this government, working in partnership with our provincial and municipal partners in our province, that is creating the jobs and economic growth. We are not doing it at the expense of other provinces. In fact the reality is that the provinces of Ontario and Alberta are fast becoming the only "have", if you will, provinces in the Confederation. We have to revisit that, look at it and perhaps ensure that we are indeed transferring our growth opportunities and our investments all around this great country.

Even in Manitoba there were 7,000 new jobs, bringing total gains since August to 13,000. In New Brunswick there were 6,000 jobs in March and the unemployment rate was down by 0.8%. In Newfoundland and Labrador, where everyone would say they have some of the most difficult economic situations to deal with in terms of their transportation problems, lack of foreign investment and lack of jobs, there was an employment increase of 3,000 in March, again reducing the unemployment rate.

Let me deal specifically with the motion. I am just trying to set the tone, if I may, that there is economic prosperity in our land, there is growth in jobs, there are low interest rates, there are balanced budgets, there are tax cuts and there are benefits that every Canadian is seeing in terms of money in their pockets and quality of life for their families.

What did the federal government do with regard to the General Motors plant in the province of Quebec that is being referred to? Let me give some examples. First, the federal government has worked closely with the mayor of Boisbriand and the committee that was set up, le Comité de soutien de l'industrie automobile dans les Basses-Laurentides, which is a task force of local business people, the Quebec government, the Canadian Autoworkers union and officials of both the Bloc Québécois and the Parti Québécois. The federal government worked with that committee, along with the mayor, to try to keep the plant in operation and save jobs.

Let me say that the government deplores the decision of General Motors to close that plant. Under no circumstances are we happy about it, nor are we supportive of it, but at the end of the day General Motors is a profitable company. General Motors is not a company that I think the taxpayers by and large would agree with federal tax subsidies going to. It is a company that is highly competitive and highly profitable. I would challenge anybody in this place who thinks we should return to the day when we were simply handing out largesse or corporate welfare to corporations like General Motors, which has the ability to set up a business plan, to balance its own operations and to make its own decisions.

Supply

Notwithstanding that, the federal government saw the plight of the workers in that plant and therefore worked with the mayor, with the local committee, with the provincial government and even with members of the federal Bloc Québécois Party to see what we could do to soften the blow or to save those jobs. Through our Canada economic development plan we supported the committee financially. We have gone to the well as much as we possibly could have to recognize the significance of this situation and to try to work with the local community. We led the negotiations at GM headquarters in Detroit in an attempt to resolve the concerns.

There are a number of other things our government has done and there is a point I want to make with regard to the workers. I think it is very important. I believe that most of the credit for this should rest with the Canadian Autoworkers, which negotiated a collective bargaining agreement that obviously had the welfare and the concerns of the people whom they represent, the workers at this plant, at heart. It is interesting to note, although I did not hear anyone opposite say this, that 90% of the people working in that plant will be eligible for early retirement. The collective bargaining agreement will ensure that salaries will be paid for up to three years. I think that is a pretty outstanding agreement negotiated with both General Motors and the Canadian Autoworkers on behalf of those people. There is a recognition by all parties concerned that this is a serious problem.

I have a situation in my neighbouring community. Many of my constituents work at the Ford plant in Oakville. Ford has made a decision to shut down one of the lines. It is no longer going to make the F-150 truck at the Ford plant. It will continue to make the van and it will continue to have a business there. It is not closing the plant, but it is closing a shift. Should we then as a government go to Ford and say that in spite of the fact that it is one of the most successful companies in its field, as is GM in North America, we should come along and use the taxpayers' money? Is that what I am hearing? Is that what people want us to do? In spite of the fact that there would be many people in my community who would be impacted by that Ford decision, I do not think even they would want me to suggest to the finance minister or the Prime Minister that somehow we should ride to the rescue and bail out some of these corporations.

I know for a fact that all the members opposite in all parties use the Human Resources Development Canada offices right across the land to help their displaced workers, to help their people who have families and who need assistance to get back on their feet after a job loss through no particular fault of their own. I know they will go to bat for their constituents and their workers through the employment insurance fund to make sure that their people are dealt with fairly and have an opportunity to get their lives back together.

• (1630)

These are difficult times and difficult decisions. When we figure that through a form of attrition, through guaranteed collective bargaining, 90% will be looked after financially and then with HRDC's assistance some opportunities will be put in place for retraining, it is unfair, and as I said earlier perhaps it is politically motivated, to suggest that the federal government should be condemned for these actions.

When companies look to invest in our communities we know from statistical analysis that they look for a number of things. They look for stability in the community. They look for quality education for their children. They look for safety in the community. They look for affordable housing. They look for good transportation for their employees. They look for an available well trained labour force. They look for financial competence and leadership from the municipal, provincial and federal governments.

That kind of leadership exists in my city of Mississauga. I know it exists across the country. In spite of the protestations from the members opposite, I also know it exists in the province of Quebec. Frankly, I think this condemnation is slightly out of order.

• (1635)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Madam Speaker, after hearing the same old tune from the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest, we now have to listen to the bogeyman scare tactics of the Liberals, who used tired old arguments to maintain that political instability is the root of all economic ills in Quebec. Yet, in a speech where he expressed somewhat contradictory and paradoxical views, the member himself listed Quebec's economic achievements under a Liberal government.

I would ask the hon. member to be a bit more consistent on this matter and use common sense when weighing off what he sees as the sole reason for Quebec's economic hardship, which is political instability, against the great economic achievements made possible by what he calls the excellent economic policies put in place by his government. We suggest greater consistency is in order here.

I should also point out to the hon. member that we never claimed that his government's economic policies had absolutely nothing to do with the economic prosperity that Quebec has been enjoying for a number of years. What we are saying—and I am repeating it loud and clear—is that, overall, Quebec has managed to achieve economic success in spite of the hurdles and the lack of co-operation on the part of the federal government. The federal government seldom provides meaningful support. As regards this issue, it has not provided very meaningful assistance.

As I indicated this morning, at the time, when the minister responsible for economic development in Quebec came back from Detroit, he said “We will do everything we can until the very end to ensure that the Boisbriand plant can continue its operations”. What have the minister and his government done since he made that nice statement with a hand on his heart? Absolutely nothing.

This is not from the bad separatist member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes, but from the union members of the GM plant in Boisbriand. The member opposite should leave aside his anti-separatist rhetoric.

Supply

Now, I would like to tell the hon. member, who seems to think that political instability is at the root of all that ails Quebec, that, in the year 2000, Quebecers bought 390,374 motor vehicles, for a total sales value of \$10.5 billion. As regards GM specifically, sales of GM products in Quebec generated net revenues of \$2.6 billion last year. This figure would be slightly higher if we included the share of GM's merged partners and allies.

Last year, GM's North American operations generated an average profit of \$1,189 per vehicle. With its 94,840 sales in Quebec, GM made at least \$112 million in profits on its sales in Quebec, this for the year 2000. Is this not a strictly economic argument that should justify GM being a little more sensitive to the concerns of its workers? As Henri Massé said "I drive a GM vehicle, but I can certainly switch brands".

[*English*]

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Madam Speaker, usually when one does not have something to say, one attacks someone personally. I will try to avoid that and apologize for my scratchy throat if that is what the member is hearing.

Let me say I agree with the member on one thing. I sure as heck am anti-separatist, and that can be taken to the bank. I believe we have to keep this country together. I believe most Quebecers want to keep this country together.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Not at any price.

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Yes, at any price. The fact of the matter is the people of Quebec understand that their economic future and growth will occur by being solidly supportive of this country, not separating into a separate political unit, not going off on their own. There would be nowhere to go to complain under a separatist government. They would have to look in the mirror. Even the leader of the Bloc Québécois said publicly that he supported the government in the efforts being put forth to try to save the GM plant.

If they want to condemn us, perhaps they had better look in the mirror because they should be condemning themselves.

• (1640)

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I do agree with the member opposite that using today's supply day motion to criticize the government about failing to subsidize a profitable organization really is a waste of time. I must say there are so many other better things to criticize the government of. The list is extensive—

An hon. member: We never asked for subsidies. That is rubbish.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I apologize to the hon. member, but we will show the same respect to the speaker that was shown to the hon. member.

[*Translation*]

All members will have their turn for questions and comments. I ask that the same kind of respect be extended to all.

The hon. member for Fraser Valley.

[*English*]

Mr. Chuck Strahl: Madam Speaker, I was saying that there are so many other better things to criticize the government for and I could

have given a long list. There are a couple of points I would like to make.

In British Columbia we could only wish that an auto plant would close. We do not have any auto plants in British Columbia because of the longstanding industrial strategy of the federal government to ensure that the auto industry is focused in a narrow geographic area. We do not have an aerospace industry to shut down because it is focused on a specific area because of a long term government industrial strategy.

We could wish for a shutdown but we do not have those industries because the government has not allowed the marketplace to determine where the plants should be located. For too long it has used government strategy, government subsidies and government money to make sure that we in British Columbia are hewers of wood and carriers of water instead of having the diversified industrial economy we could have had if the government and others before it had not interfered in the free marketplace.

I ask the member to comment on his explanation that it is wrong, and I agree with him, for the government at this time to intervene in a market driven economy and to give public money to a profitable corporation. It is making profits and is one of the biggest employers in Canada. It is just plain wrong.

Would he also agree that it is wrong to give other kinds of government subsidies to profitable businesses in the same way? Why for example would the government continue to give different industrial type subsidies to Bombardier? Again it is a profitable and very successful Canadian company which we can be proud of. However it does not deserve or need in my opinion government largesse because it is already making a good profit and producing good products.

To be consistent, would it not be right to wean all of these companies off the government teat so that they would finally carry their own load in the free market world that we increasingly have to compete in? We could do away with the challenges from Brazil. We could do away with the accusations that ministers use their relationships with people in companies to get stuff and all of that. Would it not be better just to get out of the business of business and let the free market decide what is successful?

Mr. Steve Mahoney: Madam Speaker, that is actually the stated position of the official opposition, unless of course it has to do with farm subsidies or softwood lumber when we would not want to let the free market take over there, we would want to make sure we get in there and help out. The point is I think there has to be a balance.

Let me be clear that we did not totally ignore the General Motors plant in the province of Quebec. In fact, when GM announced its retrofit of \$450 million, \$220 million of that was lent by both the federal and the provincial governments. It was given an interest free period to 2017.

An hon. member: Shame.

Supply

Mr. Steve Mahoney: The member says shame. It is not a shame.

It is the same as investments in our technology partnerships fund. It allows for companies to do research and development, to do retooling. The taxpayer gets the money back. In the case of the technology partnerships fund, the taxpayer actually shares in the benefits by getting paid dividends. I would be happy to share many examples of that with the member opposite.

Handouts and freebies are not on. Good business decisions to ensure that jobs are protected and that economic development works in our communities is what our government is all about.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The hon. member for Beauport—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, we are asking for the same respect.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Order, please. It is very difficult for the Chair to hear the hon. member who is speaking when everyone is speaking at the same time.

The hon. member for Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to read the motion that we have been debating since 10:15 this morning. I do not want, through my speech, to answer my colleague from Fraser Valley, as a member of the Canadian Alliance or the former Progressive Conservative/Democratic Representative Coalition. This colleague has changed places several times in the House.

First of all, we must specify that, what the Bloc Québécois is seeking through this motion is not for tens of millions of dollars in grants for General Motors. This is not the goal. We sometimes have to be educators because some colleagues come to the House for a little while, attend other businesses and think they can just hop on the train. I would like to read the motion once again.

This text reads, and I quote:

That this House condemn the government for its inability to defend the workers at the General Motors plant in Boisbriand and thus allowing the vehicle assembly sector of the Quebec auto industry to disappear.

This is a condemnation of the government.

Right off the top, I would like to congratulate GM workers in Boisbriand who, in spite of the threat of closure that has been hovering over this plant for a number of years—since the Liberals came to power—have kept on working very hard to show GM that their plant is economically viable and must stay open.

These workers must be congratulated. They could have done as others have in other places where very low morale, sabotage, threats, strained labour relations, clashes between clans, and deteriorating equipment have been observed. But no, they have kept on working, rolling up their sleeves and saying they would prove GM was making a mistake, and there is no way their plant will close. These

workers, members of the Canadian Auto Workers, Quebec section, must be congratulated.

On behalf of my party, I attended a press conference in the Quebec City area in February. A convoy of workers travelled through Quebec. I have newspaper clippings about this; it was covered by the regional press in every region of Quebec.

I attended this meeting at the FTQ offices in Quebec, and I noticed that people from the local union, but also those from the Canadian Auto Workers headquarters are first and foremost professionals.

I drive a GM product which I bought from the GM dealer in my riding on the Beaupré coast. My car was built in a plant in Lansing, Michigan, I believe, since there is a sticker to this effect on the rear window, and I am quite pleased with it. People in my riding came to me; customers of this dealership were upset about GM's plans to shut the plant down.

• (1650)

Ordinary citizens were saying “There is no way the only assembly plant in Quebec can be shut down. The people of Quebec will not stand for it. There should be a campaign for a Quebec boycott of GM products, to make the company think it over”.

We members of this House, regardless of our party label, whether our friends over there, or those of us over here, were sent here by our fellow citizens to speak for them. They elected us democratically for that purpose. The comment I am going to make is not partisan in any way.

I came here with a mission. I felt obliged to pass the message on to the union representatives at the press conference and the meeting in Quebec City. “People are talking about a campaign to boycott GM products”. The union's response to this made it clear this was not the solution. Its response was very responsible and professional. “On the contrary, we will keep working on productivity, on controlling costs, and on proving that this cannot happen. It makes no sense to shut down a plant that is cost-effective”.

I must again—even if this makes six times in three minutes—congratulate the workers of GM Boisbriand. I do this in order to be properly understood.

GM's success in Quebec is not just because of costs. Strong increases in productivity have played an even greater role. Despite the constant threats regarding the future of the plant which have lowered production substantially in the past five years, the workers at the Boisbriand plant have become more and more productive.

Auto industry productivity experts agree that the facilities, which are operating well under capacity, are at a serious disadvantage.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to see that I am still able to capture your attention on such an important topic. I am sure that people living in Ahuntsic, in your riding, work at GM.

How can a plant designed to turn out 230,000 vehicles a year remain cost-effective if it produces only 75,000? I am not claiming to be an economist. I worked in human resources for 16 years in the pulp and paper industry. And this is easily understandable. We have a plant capable of turning out 230,000 vehicles and we are asking it to be cost-effective, productive and to cut its costs while producing only 75,000 vehicles a year.

Yet employee performance in Boisbriand is better today than at GM's other sports vehicle plant in Bowlinggreen, Kentucky, the plant producing Corvettes. GM's Boisbriand plant produces Camaros and Firebirds, so-called sports models. We need to compare vehicles. If we are going to compare one plant with another, we must pick plants with comparable products.

Madam Speaker, you are letting me know that I have one minute left. I should have told you at the beginning that I was going to use the full time allowed me, 20 minutes. I therefore understand that I still have—

• (1655)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I am sorry, but the clerk indicated initially that Bloc members would be splitting their time. We will correct that. You have ten minutes left.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Speaker, your remarks lasted one minute. You just told me I had one minute left, and now I have ten more, and one plus ten makes ten, I guess. No problem. Even if you must be neutral, you are still a Liberal member. In any case I am not questioning your integrity. But you have to know that I will use my time to the very last second. That is a given.

Over the last ten years, productivity at the Boisbriand plant has increased by 70%, compared to an average of 54% in all GM plants. Therefore, it can be said that its performance has been good despite an uncertain future. These figures are not provided by the Bloc Quebecois. You can check them. They come from the annual Harbour Report, put out by a specialized firm that examines productivity reports in the auto industry. From 1989 to 1996 the Boisbriand plant had an average productivity of 55.7%, when GM's average was 40.6%. From 1997 to 2000, productivity increased by 14.5% in Boisbriand whereas the average increase was only 13.4%. The total increase was 70.2%, while the average increase for GM was 54%.

On top of cost advantages, the excellent increase in productivity, despite an uncertain future, is one more proof of the deep commitment of Boisbriand workers to the success of their plant.

I could also mention government support. In 1987, when the plant experienced a few problems, different levels of government, including the Quebec government, made an interest free loan to the Boisbriand plant.

However, since my time is limited, I will skip this issue to concentrate on another aspect.

Earlier, our colleague from Mississauga West, like the good Ontarian that he is—my mother always says that it is easy to talk on a full stomach—does not understand, with 98% of Canada's auto industry concentrated in Ontario, that Quebec wants to save the only assembly plant within its territory.

Supply

When we hear comments like the ones made by our colleague from Mississauga West, who talks about political instability, we thank him. We, in the Bloc Quebecois, have the speeches of our colleague from Mississauga West translated into French and we distribute them throughout Quebec because it spurs us on. It motivates us, it puts wood in our stove. I see my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord laughing. He loves it when I use local expressions in my speeches because, even though I represent a riding in the Quebec City area, I am still very proud to be a native of the Saguenay region. Like I said it puts wood in our stove to hear ridiculous comments like those made by my colleague from Mississauga West and my colleague from Fraser Valley, who says that we are asking the government to subsidize profitable plants when it is not the case at all.

On the issue of instability mentioned by the member for Mississauga West, let me say that, in 2000 and 2001, GM made various investments including \$1.5 billion in its Springfield plant, in Tennessee; \$122 million in its Asumbuja plant, in Portugal; \$70 million in its Lansing plant where my Oldsmobile was assembled; \$700 million in its Oklahoma City plant; \$500 million in its Kansas City plant, and \$340 million in a plant located in Russia.

• (1700)

In Russia, they do not speak English but GM invested \$340 million in Russia; it invested \$33 million in a plant in Lafayette, Indiana; \$200 million in a plant in Loughton, England—but there is a good chance they speak English there; and \$400 million in a plant in Saragossa, Spain. And that is not counting various other developments in Asia and North America shortly before that. It is clear that GM invests everywhere except in Quebec.

Let us not forget that, when GM decided to build its plant in Sainte-Thérèse, 36 years ago I think, it was not to please us. It was because it realized it could count on highly skilled, qualified and hard-working employees.

During the visit I mentioned earlier, I met guys who said: "I have GM tattooed on my heart". These people are proud to work for their company. If GM came here, it is because it was a good business decision. It now has one of the best plants.

When Canadian Auto Workers met Ms. Darkes, the former President of GM—I have been told she has been transferred—she said "The problem with the GM plant in Boisbriand is not so much one of cost or productivity as it is of overcapacity". When one decides to make investments in Portugal, Russia, England or Spain and in five or six plants in the United States or elsewhere, does this mean that there are no productivity or overcapacity problems elsewhere? The question begs the answer.

Let us consider other statistics. Quite recently, on April 16, 2002, General Motors announced a 146% increase in its first quarter profits. This does not take into account exceptional costs and the profits made by the GM subsidiary called Youth Electronics, because of a strong surge in its truck sales in North America.

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For the first quarter of 2002, GM recorded profits of \$791 million U.S., or \$1.39 U.S. per share, compared to \$321 million a year earlier.

If we take into account the per capita vehicle production, the Canadian auto industry is the first in the world, ahead of that of the United States. As we know, around 85% of this production is exported to the United States, which accounts to a large extent for the trade surpluses Canada has with its powerful neighbour.

I also remind the House of the statistics mentioned a moment ago by my colleague for Verchères—Les-Patriotes. Last year, Quebecers bought 390,374 new vehicles, for a total value of \$10.5 billion.

One can acknowledge that the workers were reasonable. They have acted and continue to act in a professional way. Contrary to what my colleague from Fraser Valley was saying a moment ago, we are not asking for charity nor for grants. We are saying that the federal government should assume its responsibilities, that it should pressure General Motors to keep the only assembly plant outside of Ontario, and located in Quebec, open and maintain the jobs of these skilled workers.

What we are asking of General Motors and the federal government is consideration and respect for the workers, who are not asking for charity but only want what is rightfully theirs.

• (1705)

Mr. Serge Marcil (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I said earlier today, the auto industry, in Quebec, should have a great future.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Serge Marcil: Of course, if you would only listen, maybe you would understand something.

Of course, it takes more than assembling cars to say that there is an auto industry in a country or a region, as I said this morning. The Premier of Quebec said so also many times when he spoke about the importance of repositioning Quebec's auto industry in the auto parts sector. Many announcements concerning investments were made, and we will develop, in due time, one of the most promising sectors in Quebec.

It is said that Quebec is the fourth largest producer of aluminum in the world, and the second largest producer of magnesium, after China. We have an exceptional advantage over other countries.

To ensure continuity and conformity to the Kyoto accord—this needs to be said—auto makers will put greater emphasis on building lighter cars. They will see greater use of lighter metals, such as aluminum and magnesium.

In the case of Quebec, as far as we are concerned, there has been from the start very close co-operation between the two levels of government on this issue. There have been many efforts made and many actions taken. Even today, no solution has been found which would allow the plant to remain open. We have no guarantee that it will remain open. It seems that GM, as my colleague from the opposition said earlier, is restructuring its operations on the international market. As a matter of fact, GM reported large profits for the first quarter. The company is investing a lot outside of North

America: in Portugal, in Spain and all over the world. The reason for this is that we are living in a global market, and we are the ones who are paying the price.

While we have some difficulties, because since GM has closed its plant in Ontario it wants to do the same in Quebec, we have a significant advantage in the auto parts sector. I believe it is one of the solutions that has also been put forward by the committee, which includes a Canadian government representative, as well as a Quebec government representative.

So there is auto parts manufacturing. We must use our magnesium and aluminum sector, do the processing here and manufacture parts. We should not think that, tomorrow morning, everything will be over and that a grim future awaits Quebec.

On the contrary, I think we should look ahead. We must continue to find solutions and try to develop the parts sector, which is linked to the auto industry, and focus on our great production of magnesium and aluminum. The jobs we are temporarily losing could then be regained. They would be high quality jobs, which would allow our young people to move ahead.

I always come back to the initial motion, which blames the government of Canada for not having taken action on this issue. Excuse me, but people should at least tell the truth, namely that the Government of Canada was the first to take action on this issue. We developed partnerships with the Government of Quebec as well as with unions on this issue and we are continuing with our work.

• (1710)

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Speaker, was there a question in there for me? It was like a diatribe devoid of any substance.

I made a 20 minute speech. I expressed my views and made some remarks. Maybe we should explain to the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry, who sat in the National Assembly of Quebec and was even a minister, what the parliamentary procedure is here in the House of Commons. We try to finish with a question for the previous speaker.

Having said that, I want to add to the comments made by the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry. Both go hand in hand. We are working on promoting parts manufacturing. By providing tax incentives in the region of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean to help develop the aluminum valley, the Government of Quebec has assumed its responsibilities and tried to get secondary and tertiary manufacturing going.

When the Premier of Quebec, Bernard Landry, announced the production of 500 megawatts in Sept-Îles, it was on the condition—and that is when we realized why Alcan was so interested—that we would no longer only be producing the ingots we see in the Parc des Laurentides on trucks and double road trains, which—by the way—cause so much damage to our highways, or on Powell pier in the city of La Baie, but also get involved in further processing.

I mentioned the region of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and aluminum valley, but we could talk about the other auto parts made of magnesium. I repeat for the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry that the two go together. We are working on the development aspect. Will we accept second best and say “We will be content with the parts sector since we are losing the assembly plant”? This is not how Quebec's interests should be defended in Ottawa. We are not asking for handouts, but we want to keep the last assembly plant outside of Ontario open.

I am very disappointed by the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry's comments. I do not want to play party politics nor to argue with him, but these comments from a member who has been a minister in Quebec City really disappoint me, because some members of the Quebec Liberal Party are nationalists. I am very disappointed to hear these comments about being content with second best. The member for Beauharnois—Salaberry seems to be thrown in the towel.

If the workers in his riding have heard his speech, and they will receive a copy of it in any case, they should ask him “Do you agree that we should lose our jobs? You have told us that there will be an auto parts plant in Alma”. Will somebody owning a house in Sainte-Thérèse have to sell it because of a new job in Alma? It is not even sure that this person will get it. This is not the way things work. The two go together. We agree with the manufacturing of parts, but the assembly plant has to stay open.

Mr. André Harvey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to see that my colleague has not forgotten the region he comes from. It is true that I found it amusing at one point when he said that they get the speeches of one of our colleagues from Ontario translated and that gives the Bloc fuel for their fire.

I am not sure that fire is particularly well fueled, because with the 20% or 25% they are getting in the polls, they are going to need to change their fuel. This is not a strong showing, not such a great performance.

In fact, a few months after this business started—it is, after all, some months since GM announced its decision—the government was already involved, through the minister responsible for Canada Economic Development at that time, who took part in the negotiations. We are doing all we can to reactivate the situation.

What I would like to address, however, is the fact that my colleague spoke a good deal about aluminum. It is true that the federal government is investing more and more in R and D with its various programs.

In my own region, the Government of Canada is currently investing \$60 million for laboratories that will enable us to transform aluminum. My colleague was right about that. Canada produces 2 million tonnes of aluminum annually, and another 500,000 tonnes are imported as finished products, from Europe and the U.S.

The change that has to be made—I agree on maintaining the assembly plants—is via research and development. The major regions throughout the world that have developed have not done so because of Bloc Québécois or Parti Québécois committees. They have done so because of laboratories where scientists carry out

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research, where products are designed and markets designated. This is what the Canadian government is doing when it takes part in committees. It funded the maintenance committee and it will continue to work hard on this.

I would advise the hon. member to change the fuel he is using. Their 25% performance in the polls shows that they are not using the right one.

● (1715)

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Speaker, I do not need any advice from the turncoat member for Chicoutimi, who was a PQ member in 1984, then a Conservative and now a Liberal. There are rumours in the Saguenay region that he will be joining the NDP.

People listen to us, and there are persistent rumours that he is thinking about running for the NDP leadership—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The hon. member's time has expired. Resuming debate. The hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate following our colleague's brilliant speech. I must say that his review of the record of the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord is extremely realistic. He talked about 20% to 25%, which is still 20% more than during the last election campaign that he did with the Conservatives, is it not?

We will get back to the comments made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry. I hope that he will join his voice to those of Bloc Québécois members, and that he will be an active participant in this debate.

The hon. member for Laurentides, the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles and the hon. member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes worked extremely hard, along with the unions and the stakeholders, to ensure that this would not be a partisan issue.

I know that I can speak on behalf of all my colleagues and say that, regardless of which side of the House they sit on, members who want to work to protect jobs in one of Quebec's most important sectors, can count on the support of the Bloc Québécois, the public and the workers.

My colleague, the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, has nevertheless left out an important detail. He would have deserved our respect and we would have appreciated him more if he had stood in his place and admitted that his government reneged on a promise.

The mayor of Boisbriand, if he were here today, would not be very proud of the remarks of the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and of the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry. Why? Because they did not acknowledge that the federal government made commitments nearly a year ago. I hope they will stand, ask a question and confirm that.

Can the GM workers rely on the federal government to get the help of two lobbyists and administrative support? Will the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry confirm that? Will they take their responsibilities and stand up for Quebec for once?

Supply

When I read the motion moved this morning, I had mixed feelings. First, I was very proud of the work of the hon. members for Laurentides, Rivière-des-Mille-Îles and Verchères—Les-Patriotes. Once more, the phrase “defending exclusively the interests of Quebec” had all its meaning.

These mixed feelings meant that my pride was also tinged with considerable disappointment. Why was I so disappointed? If there is a time in the life of parliamentarians when all Quebecers should speak as one and do so forcefully, it is when people's livelihood is involved, when it is a question of maintaining jobs, when it is a question of ensuring that people can put bread on the table. This is no time for partisan politics.

The auto issue is extremely instructive; it illustrates very clearly what Canadian confederation is all about. The 1,400 people directly involved in this issue and the 9,000 indirectly involved are conscientious employees, taxpayers. GM is a family.

People who work in a plant such as the one in Boisbriand have often spent their whole life there. Sometimes, their grandfather or father worked there, their children work there, and the entire corporate culture places value on the family. In a region, this is important to maintaining jobs.

How is it that the federal government was not at least as enterprising as the government of Quebec? If it had been as enterprising as the government of Quebec, there is not one member of the Bloc Québécois who would not have admitted it. We can tell when the federal government does something good.

I hear the loud guffaws of the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry. I could give him many examples where we have supported the government, when it was in Quebec's interest to do so.

● (1720)

I could talk about the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. We supported the government. I could talk about the centres of excellence. We supported the government there because it was in the interest of Quebec.

However, it is impossible for this government and I say from my chair that it is impossible for government members from Quebec to act fairly and equitably to defend the interests of Quebec. It is impossible because, for decades, 90% of the auto industry has been concentrated in Ontario.

No one was able to correct this injustice. I say again, respectfully, that when I hear the groveling and servile speeches from some of the members from Quebec, who are prepared to accept the fact that the industry is shutting down, that there will be an exodus of workers, that the assembly will be done elsewhere, I can only conclude that we see things differently. Members of the Bloc Québécois would never give in. We will defend the interests of the GM workers in Boisbriand.

It is pretty sad that today, we are required to debate a motion such as this. Let us look at history. There was a great deal of hope in the establishment of that plant 36 or 37 years ago. The job market was very different. People with a grade 10, 11 or 12 education would be hired by GM, and become skilled, respectable workers able to see to the needs of their family. They would develop their skills, participate

in an industrial culture and especially contribute to the economy of the whole region. That is what it was like at GM.

Earlier we heard a number of speeches. I will not comment on the speech made by the Minister of Industry. I listened to his speech from my office. Is there anyone more spineless when it comes to doing what is needed to defend the interests of Quebec?

What gives us cause for hope? First and foremost the men and women at GM. I am told that they have travelled across Quebec and that they will end their trip with a huge rally in Montreal. These men and women know full well that if the federal government refuses to move, there is only one way to make it move. How? We know governments can be blind at times, but they are never deaf. They show up where there is noise. GM workers will make noise with the help of the dynamic forces of the Quebec civil society and of course of Bloc Québécois members. If members on the government side want to join us, they are totally, absolutely welcome in a non-partisan way.

The situation is all the harder to understand as we are not dealing with an under-performing plant. This is not the problem. This is an issue of what is called in economic terms product substitution. Because they cannot find a market for a very specific product in a particular niche, they propose getting rid of the plant.

I believe it is my duty to remind members that the president GM, Mrs. Maureen Kempston Darkes, made the following statement. I would like to share it because I believe it sums up the situation perfectly.

She said: “The Boisbriand plant has gone through good times and bad times since it opened in 1965. The decision to close the plant is not based on its productivity”.

“The decision to close the plant is not based on its productivity.” The issue here is certainly not workers' output. This is not the issue.

● (1725)

I continue:

It is not based on its quality or its workers. We consider Sainte-Thérèse as a very good plant. The only reason why we are closing it is that we could not find a product to assemble there in replacement of the Camaro or the Firebird.

What is the role of a government, particularly a government with budget laxness, a government that has such huge surpluses that it does not know what to do with them? When workers who did their job well, who developed an expertise, who work in a plant or an industrial sector that has added value, with interesting working conditions, should we not, as parliamentarians, as Quebecers, and all those who believe in the workers, expect that this government would loosen up its purse strings?

Once again, if this government had shown as much initiative as the Quebec government did, we would have been the first ones to recognize it. But this is not the case and cannot be the case.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

[English]

When the Government of Canada wants to take action in the auto industry, it has to put up with a strong two-tier lobbying: the auto industry itself and the Ontario caucus. This is the tragedy of our system.

If the government had wanted to arbitrate — I see my friend, the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry, who is nodding with a look of despair, and I challenge him to stand up and show me why the government has not arbitrated in favour of Quebec when it is possible to do so—and if it has not done so, it is because one of two things: either because it does not believe in Quebec or because it is not possible due to the clout of Ontario within the caucus.

That is why, historically, as every Bloc Quebecois member has pointed out, 90% or 95% of the auto industry has been concentrated in Ontario. That is the unfairness of the system.

We, in the Bloc Quebecois, will not get discouraged. We will put all our energy into this. We have in the area a team of members of parliament who are very familiar with the issue, very involved and very close to the population. We will fight on until the government loosens its purse strings.

I want to conclude by recalling how sad it is that GM has made investments in other parts of the world while totally ignoring what could have been a solution here.

Madam Speaker, I think my time has is up, but allow me to ask for the consent of the House to make that motion votable.

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Is there unanimous consent to make this motion a votable item?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Bakopanos): It being 5.30 p.m., it is my duty to inform the House that the debate on the motion is over.

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I have received notice from the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas that he is unable to move his motion during private members' hour on Friday, April 26. It has not been possible to arrange an exchange of positions in the order of precedence. Accordingly I am directing the table officers to drop that item of business to the bottom of the order of precedence.

Private members' hour will thus be cancelled tomorrow and the House will continue with the business before it prior to private members' hour.

It being 5.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

DIVORCE ACT

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should immediately act on the December 1998 Report of the Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access entitled "For the Sake of Children", and that the Minister of Justice should be condemned for failing to propose amendments to the Divorce Act on the basis of this report.

He said: Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure today to speak to Motion No. 329, which is designed to again point out to the Canadian people and to the House the necessity of looking after what might be described as a motherhood issue in old fashioned language. It is the importance of families and children to our society, the importance of the basic family unit to look after those children and the importance of our role as legislators in helping to look after children's needs in the unfortunate and sometimes tragic case of marital breakdown and the subsequent problems that entails for many children.

It is important to note that a majority of parents, even when marriages break down, do their best to look after their children and to put them first. There are occasions when children are used as pawns in a very unfortunate marital breakdown. This motion today is to again highlight the need for the House to be seized by that and to talk about putting children first in a children first agenda.

That is one of the reasons I brought this motion forward. It reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should immediately act on the December 1998 Report of the Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access entitled "For the Sake of the Children", and that the Minister of Justice should be condemned for failing to propose amendments to the Divorce Act on the basis of this report.

I point out there are two reasons why private members' motions and bills are brought forward. The first reason is the member actually wants, expects and hopes to develop new legislative options. Unfortunately, as we have seen again in the past week or two, that so seldom happens. There is an awful lot of work that goes into proposing alternatives. I have proposed alternatives on the management of CIDA, peacekeeping operations, the most recent blood samples act, et cetera. Members try their best to promote those things, but we all realize the government almost never passes them and the initiatives come and go by the wayside. We do our best but there is not much chance of them coming to fruition.

The second reason is a motion is put forward to point out that the work has already been done and it is simply a matter of the government finally getting on the bandwagon and making something actually happen. The work in this case has been done. It was done in 1998. The report was tabled. It is called "For the Sake of the Children" and be adopted in its entirety for the sake of the children. It is well named.

Private Members' Business

It is an excellent report and I urge people to read it. It deals with difficult issues like custody, alimony, payments for access to children, joint parenting proposals, the way the courts should be organized and all those kinds of things. It is also excellent because it puts the children first and that is what we should be talking about. I hope in the debate today we have a chance to describe the situation currently in Canada and what this report recommends.

I brought this motion forward because a few years ago I was dealing with a problem that a constituent of mine had. He was from Abbotsford. His former wife took their two children and moved to the east coast. He was subsequently laid off from his job and it took three full years for the courts to acknowledge the change in his employment status. In this case the court system pushed the father to the edge of financial ruin and dropped him into the abyss of deep, emotional anguish because the court would not recognize the change in his financial situation. Nor would it allow him access to his children on the other side of the country.

He felt that if the "For the Sake of the Children" report or parts of it had been adopted and had been passed into law by federal and provincial governments, it would have helped both he and his children during those difficult years. This constituent's interests were also driven by a sense of selflessness. He did not want the suffering that he had gone through to happen to others. He was especially gripped by the tragic story of Darrin White, which I will relay very briefly.

Darrin White was from Prince George, B.C. He committed suicide on March 13, 2000 after a court gave him only limited access to his children and ordered him to pay his estranged wife twice his take home pay in child support and alimony each month. The man was so desperate he eventually took his own life. The B.C. supreme court ordered him to pay his ex wife and three children \$2,071 a month while his net pay was less than \$1,000 per month. It was a shameful case. It drove this man to take his own life because he could see no way out the situation.

• (1735)

Because of this case and for his own well-being, the well-being of other parents and especially the well-being of children my constituent has continually kept the issue in the forefront when addressing the groups he speaks to. He has urged me to do the same. I am happy to do so today.

The roots of the report "For the Sake of the Children" date back to 1996 and 1997 when we were studying Bill C-41 which proposed to amend the Divorce Act. Witnesses came forward in large numbers. It was decided the committee should tour the country to get a holistic overview of how to fix a system that seemed based in another era, bring it up to date and put forward a modern, 21st century solution for all of us who want to put the concerns of children at the forefront.

The 48 recommendations in the committee's report not only had broad support from the all party Senate and House of Commons committee. They had the support of interest groups, parenting groups, children's advocates and others. They seemed to have the support of everyone but they have not been acted on. The report was tabled in 1998. Here we are four years later and there has been no significant change to the Canadian divorce system.

I will highlight a number of the recommendations. The committee recommended amending the Divorce Act by replacing the term custody and access with the principle of shared parenting. This would give mothers and fathers equal decision making powers on matters of fundamental importance such as schooling, medical treatment and religious upbringing.

At present custodial parents make all the decisions while access parents are only visitors. The principle of shared parenting would change that. It says both parents are essential to the proper development of children and that the best way to ensure this, even when a marriage breaks down, is to put the children first and allow both parents not only to have access but to be part of the important decisions in their children's lives.

Children develop best when left in an intact home. However when that cannot happen, as it unfortunately cannot from time to time, it is best that both parents share in the responsibility as much as possible. This recommendation is one of many that would make that possible.

At the same time the proposed recommendations would make it possible for courts to deny shared custody to abusive or negligent parents, which is of course our role. It is up to us to make sure parents do not abuse their children and that children are safe in that most hallowed of places: their own home.

The recommendations called for the rejection of the tender years doctrine under which judges routinely award custody of pre-adolescent children to the mother. Responsibility should not be gender specific. It should be shared. Both parents are necessary for the proper development and security of their children.

Recommendation 16 advocated:

—that decision makers including parents and judges consider a list of criteria in determining the best interests of the child—

Again, children should come first. The whole report was a breath of fresh air because it promoted the idea that it is not about parents who may have their own problems whether interpersonal, financial or who knows what. The important thing is to put the needs of children first. The so-called problems of the parents would often fade into the background if both of them and all of us looked at the children's needs first.

Recommendation 18 urged the Minister of Justice to undertake:

—a comprehensive review of the Guidelines to reflect gender equality and the child's entitlement to financial support from both parents—

Again, the concept of shared parenting was a key theme throughout the report.

Recommendation 21 called for the provincial and territorial governments to:

—consider amending their family law to provide that maintaining and fostering relationships with grandparents and other extended family members is in the best interests of children and that such relationships should not be disrupted without a significant reason related to the well-being of the child.

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I refer to the motion brought forward in 1995 by former Reform MP Daphne Jennings advocating the rights of grandparents to access. This recommendation echoed that. It said unless it could be shown to be not in the best interests of the child we should do all we can to allow the supportive, nurturing relationships that are possible with grandparents and extended families to be maintained.

● (1740)

Recommendation 24 advocated:

—that unified family courts, in addition to their adjudicative function, include a broad range of other support services—

These would include family counselling, legal education, parenting assessment and mediation services. In other words, they would include doing what we could to prevent divorce whenever possible. They would also include looking after the needs of the whole family unit at that stage and eventually the needs of the children if necessary.

Recommendation 30 urged:

that the Divorce Act be amended to require (a) that a parent wishing to relocate with a child, where the distance would necessitate the modification of agreed or court-ordered parenting arrangements, seek judicial permission—

This recommendation would affect my constituent particularly. His estranged wife picked up her children and moved to Nova Scotia from Chilliwack. One cannot get much farther away than that. This constituent of mine went to visit his children. He should not have been doing so because there should have been shared parenting. However he went to the expense of going to the other end of the country, knocked on the door of his estranged wife and said he was there for a week to visit the kids. Her response was that she had decided not to let him see them.

My constituent sat in a hotel room and contacted a lawyer who told him he would get a court order in two or three weeks or a month. In the meantime he had to travel back to Chilliwack to look for work. Every time he went back to Nova Scotia his wife denied him access.

If the recommendations were implemented the courts would not let this happen because there would be a system of shared parenting. A parent who wanted to move that far away would have to seek permission from the court because shared parenting and the rights of the father to have an impact on his children's lives would be paramount.

The recommendations would allow custody relationships to become less adversarial. They would give greater protection to the needs of children, hence the report's title "For the Sake of the Children". The recommendations should have been enacted.

The recommendations have broad public support. They have support in parliament as well. The hon. member for Prince George—Peace River has put forward 48 private member's bills on the issue, one for every one of the recommendations because he likes them so much. He too has been seized by the groups across the country who beg and plead with us to make sure the recommendations go forward. A *National Post* poll from February asked whether Canadian child custody and access laws should be overhauled in favour of the concept of shared parenting. Some 91% of those polled said yes.

The concept of shared parenting has broad public support. It has broad support in this place. It has support in the Senate. It is the desire of parliamentarians in this place that it go forward. Yet in 1998 nothing happened. In 1999 nothing happened. In 2000 and 2001 nothing happened. Here we are in 2002 and still nothing has happened. That is a shame because as each year goes by more and more children, 50,000 children a year, are left in the lurch hoping their parents have enough maturity and common sense to find a shared parenting arrangement. However we have no legislative framework, mediative services or common court systems that allow this to be done easily and without confrontation.

It is a shame. The government has agreed that families need to have a high priority. In 1999 the then minister of justice said we must make the needs and interests of children our highest priority. Here we are in 2002 and there has been no reaction. The new Minister of Justice says changes to the Divorce Act may be tabled sometime this spring. That may be good as far as it goes but I plead with the minister to reconsider. It is not only about the Divorce Act. There are 48 recommendations. It is not only about making it simpler to steer one's way through a divorce. It is about doing what is right for kids. It will take more than a fixed divorce act to do that.

The biggest reason of all for the government to move now on the 48 recommendations and stop dragging its feet is the children. It is for the sake of the children. Thousands of difficult situations could have been avoided in the last four years alone if the recommendations had been implemented. People such as Darrin White have died because the issue has not been properly fixed.

● (1745)

Children do not get to see their parents. That could have been avoided. Some families suffer grief and pain. That could have been avoided.

I realize we are not going to vote on this motion tonight. However, I urge the government to not just look at the Divorce Act in isolation, but to look at the 48 recommendations. I urge the government to listen to the pleas of parliamentarians in both houses that we move forward, make the changes and enact the recommendations. Let us do it for the sake of the children.

Mr. Paul Harold Macklin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to address Motion No. 329 which calls on the government to act immediately on the recommendations in "For the Sake of the Children", the December 1998 report of the Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access. The motion further suggests that the Minister of Justice should be condemned for failing to propose amendments to the Divorce Act on the basis of the report. There are important points to note in responding to the motion.

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First, the motion does not acknowledge that the Government of Canada has already responded to the report of the Special Joint Committee on Custody and Access in "Strategy for Reform" which was tabled in May 1999 and that much of that strategy has already been implemented. It is worth noting that the special joint committee's recommendations were directed not only at the Government of Canada but also at provincial and territorial governments, as well as judges, relevant professionals and even the divorcing parents themselves.

Second, in criticizing the Minister of Justice for failing to propose amendments to the Divorce Act, the motion fails to appreciate the complexity of the legal issues. It also fails to acknowledge one of the most challenging aspects of family law, that many of the problems facing divorcing families are, in reality, only partly legal in nature and cannot simply be legislated away by Divorce Act amendments.

There are no easy answers. Indeed, one of the reasons the committee's report "For the Sake of the Children" is so important is precisely that it underscores this very point. There are no easy solutions to the wide variety of complex and controversial issues facing divorcing families.

Let us examine what has clearly come to be considered the main recommendation of that report, the recommendation on shared parenting. I quote:

This committee recommends that the terms "custody and access" no longer be used in the Divorce Act and instead that the meaning of both terms be incorporated and received in the new term "shared parenting".

On the surface it may appear to be an easy amendment to simply replace the terms "custody and access" in the Divorce Act with the new term "shared parenting". If we look closely at what the report actually says about shared parenting, we will find it anything but simple.

In view of the diversity of families facing divorce in Canada today, it would be presumptuous and detrimental to many to establish a one size fits all formula for parenting arrangements after separation and divorce. By the new term "shared parenting", the committee intended to combine in one package all the rights and responsibilities that are now embodied in the two existing terms "custody and access", and leave decisions about allocating the various components to parents and judges.

There is other very clear wording in the committee report confirming that this recommendation was not intended to mean that the Divorce Act should adopt a legal presumption that would impose shared parenting on all families.

Many witnesses, including individual fathers, fathers' groups and shared parenting advocates, recommended strongly that the act be amended to include a presumption in favour of joint physical custody, meaning an arrangement in which children would spend roughly equal amounts of time with each parent and where decision making would also be shared.

The committee was interested in testimony about the benefits of joint custody for both parents and children when it is agreed to voluntarily and works effectively. This type of arrangement generally involves joint decision making by parents, at least

respecting important issues such as schooling, religion and medical care, with significant periods of time spent in the care of each parent.

However, legislation that imposes or presumes joint custody as the automatic arrangement for divorcing families would ignore that this might not be suitable for all families, especially those families with a history of domestic violence or of very disparate parenting roles.

• (1750)

In other words, while the report recommends that shared parenting be incorporated into the Divorce Act, it makes it clear that the recommendation does not mean that the Divorce Act should be amended to include a presumption of shared parenting. To the contrary, it specifically says that it should not.

The problem is that the meanings and interpretations of the term custody have been the subject of much confusion and debate. Different variations of the terms, such as the role of custody, joint custody and shared custody, are sometimes used but are not always understood. Simply substituting shared parenting in the Divorce Act would not resolve the current confusion and debate about the parental roles and rights. In fact, because there are differing meanings and understandings related to the word shared this could potentially promote even more conflict and litigation.

While it is true that there are problems relating to the meaning of the term custody in the Divorce Act, it is also clear that the current provisions of the Divorce Act allow for the very type of shared parenting concept that the committee appeared to be promoting. When it can work effectively and is agreed to voluntarily the Divorce Act says that custody and access can be granted to one or more persons. It provides that the best interests of children must be the only consideration and that children should have as much contact with each parent as is consistent with their best interests.

The reality is that the committee's recommendation to amend the Divorce Act to incorporate shared parenting, contrary to what the private member's motion suggests, is not simple or clear cut. It is not only reasonable but is also responsible that the Minister of Justice and the Department of Justice carry out all the required legal analysis and consultations necessary to interpret this recommendation, especially given its complexity and importance.

It is critical to acknowledge that the federal and provincial governments have specific constitutional powers with respect to family law. While federal laws govern the cases of divorce, the provinces have legislative responsibility for custody and access in cases where the families choose to separate rather than divorce or where the parents have never been married. The provinces also have the constitutional authority to establish rules of civil procedure, including the court procedures, respecting the Divorce Act matters within their jurisdiction.

Making changes to the federal Divorce Act would have serious implications for the provinces and territories and cannot be rushed. It would require, at minimum, provincial and territorial support and, ideally, their co-operation and commitment to develop co-ordinated corresponding provincial and territorial reforms.

The overall objective is to assist all separating and divorcing families across Canada. The provinces have jurisdiction for the administration and delivery of court services. For many parents court based and community services provided by the provinces are the most important things that help them resolve the issues to reach agreements.

The motion fails to recognize that the federal government has been providing a great deal of assistance by funding and promoting these services, which include parenting education programs, dispute resolution services such as mediation, and counselling services. The Department of Justice has been working closely with the provinces and territories to ensure that these essential services are in place when parents and children need them.

I cannot support Motion No. 329 because it fails to appreciate the complexity of the extremely emotional and divisive issues that divorcing parents face. It focuses only on the Divorce Act amendments and does not acknowledge that there are many other problems which in reality are only partly legal in nature and cannot be simply legislated away. It also ignores the important joint planning and collaborative work that the federal government has done with the provinces and territories to develop and improve court based and community services to help separating and divorcing families.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak to this motion, all the more so because I practiced law in my former life. I had studied labour relations and wanted to specialize in labour law. However, the reality of the practice of law, with all the separations and divorces, led me to submit petitions for divorce, of course, but also to argue divorce cases on their merits in various courts.

I am concerned with the whole matter of children, especially after separation. This concerns me as a lawyer, a member of the House and a father of two.

For the same reasons raised in a dissenting opinion when the report entitled "For the Sake of Children" was published in 1998, you will understand that the members of the Bloc Québécois will have difficulty supporting the motion by the member for Fraser Valley requesting immediate implementation of this report by the government.

By the way, I would not want people to act like rabble rousers. Unfortunately, political discussions sometimes lead people to take a sentence or a phrase and say "Oh yes, the Bloc Québécois does not care for the children's rights in the case of a separation". We were not against the substance of the report.

The same applies to the motion. The principle involved is fine. But this is a constitutional matter and it is unfortunate that the

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government does not want to assume its responsibilities in resolving this issue. The matter is one of power sharing among provinces. And I am not talking of Quebec only. I am not talking about Quebec's interests and rights only. This has to do with the sharing of powers between the provinces and the federal government.

We know that the study by the joint committee dealt with issues that are still very current and constantly evolving: the increasing number of divorces and the reality of the children. We remember that a few decades ago, in Canada and in Quebec, marriage was the most standard form of union between two persons. Now, cohabitation is becoming increasingly widespread.

As a result of this cohabitation, children are born out of wedlock. I do not deny the appropriateness, however, it is a reality. Thus, children come to be part of a new dimension, which is often very complex.

In our opinion, this special joint committee was not the appropriate forum to look at legislative solutions to social issues that affect more and more of our fellow citizens.

Indeed, we realized, when the report was being drafted, that there is a paradox, an unjustifiable dichotomy, in the view of the members of the Bloc Québécois, in terms of power sharing between the provinces and the federal government. All matters relating to the family, education and social services, as well as all issues relating to legal separation, are clearly under provincial jurisdiction.

• (1800)

In Quebec we have the civil code. As members know, our civil code comes from the Napoleonic Code; our civil law is the civil law of France. In Quebec, sections 493 and following deal with legal separation.

However, under the Constitution, divorce comes under federal jurisdiction. Members will agree that most divorces are settled out of court. They are settled through agreements. The court simply ratifies whatever the parties agree upon. In Quebec, we also have family mediation services to help couples come to an agreement. We have lawyers who specialize in mediation.

In most cases, it is at the time of the legal separation that agreements on child custody and access are signed. As legal separation comes under provincial jurisdiction, it would be logical for divorce legislation to also come under provincial jurisdiction.

We think it would be much simpler if all of family law came under the same jurisdiction, the provincial one.

Let me quote a long text from a prominent expert in constitutional law in Canada, whose expertise no one would question. He is a specialist; it is Senator Gérald Beaudoin, a Conservative member of the other house.

Senator Beaudoin is not known for being a sovereignist. We must recognize this. I hope we are able to agree that there will be a summer, and a winter. I would also like us to agree that Senator Gérald Beaudoin is not a sovereignist. He says so himself, he is a federalist. Sometimes, however, he is a tired federalist, as was the father of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Mr. Léon Dion.

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So I quote Senator Gérald Beaudoin, who wrote in 1990:

One might ask why, in 1867, the framers gave Parliament exclusive jurisdiction over marriage and divorce. This seems to have been for religious reasons. Under article 185 of the Civil Code of Lower Canada, marriage could be dissolved only by the natural death of one of the spouses.

It was impossible to divorce under the civil code of Lower Canada. This principle was accepted by the vast majority of Quebecers, who, at the time as you know, were Catholic.

Let us talk about the situation of Protestants. We must refer to people from other provinces because Quebec was by and large French and Catholic, and the other provinces were English and Protestant.

The Protestants, however, wanted the Canadian parliament to legislate divorce, hence section 91.26 of the Constitution Act, 1867, which gave the federal parliament exclusive jurisdiction over marriage and divorce.

Yet, that which was appropriate in 1867 may no longer be appropriate today, because the society in which the law evolves is, by definition, an evolving society. I do not need to tell the House that we do things differently today than we did in 1867.

So, it is important, critical even, that our laws reflect contemporary society. It is our responsibility as legislators to tailor the statutes to today's realities.

● (1805)

We in the Bloc Québécois were of the opinion that the provinces should have had complete jurisdiction over family law and should have been able to legislate in this area.

Given that I am out of time, I would simply like to say that we cannot support the motion moved by the member for Fraser Valley. *[English]*

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Fraser Valley for the work he has done on this issue. Although we are not that close in terms of seating arrangements, I think most of us acknowledge that he has done a good job on this issue and it does deserve some attention from the House. I want to put a few points on the record.

In December 1997 the Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access undertook a challenging task to examine the issues relating to custody and access arrangements after separation and divorce, with special emphasis on the needs and the best interests of the children. Over a 12 month period the committee held 55 meetings and heard from over 520 witnesses. The committee also received hundreds of letters and detailed briefs from concerned citizens and professionals interested in various aspects of the study.

In December 1998 the report came back to the House. It took the government five months to issue a draft response to the report. At the time the Minister of Justice said:

The Committee's review has shown that those who must turn to the system would be better served by a less adversarial approach that encourages parental responsibilities and provides both parents with opportunities to guide and nurture their children. In most cases, children and youth benefit from meaningful relationships with both mothers and fathers.

It has been over four years now and nothing has been done. The committee report told the government that the Divorce Act should be

amended and recognized that the parents' relationships with their children do not end upon separation or divorce.

Among the many suggestions made, the committee pointed out that children should have the opportunity to be heard when parenting decisions affecting them are being made. It also pointed out that those children whose parents divorce should have the opportunity to express their views to a skilled professional whose duty it would be to make these views known to any judge, assessor or mediator making or facilitating a shared parenting determination. As well, the court should have the authority to appoint an interested third party, such as a member of the child's extended family, to support and represent the child during parental separation or divorce.

The committee also noted that the relationships of grandparents, siblings and other extended family members with children be recognized as significant and that provisions for maintaining and fostering such relationships where they are in the best interests of these children be included in the parenting plans.

Some men's groups and fathers asked that the committee consider recommending a presumption in favour of shared parenting or joint custody. They argued that this would be the only way to ensure that both parents negotiated or participated in mediation in good faith and with the children's best interests as the main focus.

While the committee made no such recommendation, it did recognize the value of shared decision making and equal time sharing where appropriate. Witnesses included psychologists and social workers who stated that children benefit from maintaining a relationship with both parents after divorce.

Dr. John Service, executive director of the Canadian Psychological Association testified at the committee. He stated:

The best solutions are, of course, those that can effect a separation and divorce with a minimum of trauma. Generous custody and access arrangements are most often in the best interests of the children and parents.

The witnesses from Families in Transition testified that the children they see seem to be more secure when the parental conflict has decreased and when the child feels sure of the parental commitment of love for them.

● (1810)

Many witnesses testified that parenting education immediately following the separation would help reduce conflict between divorcing spouses. This in turn would benefit the children by making parents aware of how divorce affects them and the damage that can be caused by ongoing conflict. We see that in our communities, that ongoing conflict with no resolution.

Several witnesses presented detailed evidence about parenting education programs offered in their communities. In Alberta, for example, a parenting education program entitled "Parenting After Separation" has become mandatory and parents must attend the course before they can proceed with an application for divorce. In other parts of the country social service agencies, community groups, family court clinics and at least one law firm, yes, a law firm, offer educational programs.

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"For the Sake of the Children" was a positive step toward laying the foundation for legislation which would take into consideration the best interests of the child when these unfortunate circumstances occur.

The Progressive Conservative Party supports shared custody as long as it is in the best interests of the children. We are proud to say that we played an effective role on the special joint committee. We were a strong voice on the issue of shared custody. We feel that the courts should work in harmony with social services to ensure that no matter what the custody arrangement, the best interests of the children would be paramount.

We share the frustration of many Canadians knowing that our children would continue to suffer because the recommendations for change would not be legislated into law. The Liberal government seems unwilling to take action on this issue. We recommend any proposal that would move this into the view of the House and the Canadian public. We need legislation that would give fair and equitable treatment to both parents involved in child custody arrangements while ensuring the best interests of the children.

We acknowledge there are problems in the current system. After a bitter divorce some parents deny visitation access to the other parent and use their children to get even with their former spouses. That is happening across the country as we speak.

We have seen recent abductions of children by non-custodial parents who have become desperate after repeatedly being denied visitation rights. None of us can defend that kind of action, but it provides evidence of the negative effect that this has on our children. Shared custody should help avert the often extreme animosity that exists between divorced parents fighting for access to their children. This would provide a much healthier environment with less conflict for children to grow up.

Along with my PC colleagues I hope the government would put children first and take the necessary action to fix the problems, and to implement the recommendations of this report. We support the motion.

• (1815)

Mr. Larry Spencer (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I want to express my appreciation to the hon. member for Fraser Valley for bringing the motion forward. It is high time that we discussed this matter.

Let me quickly read from the Canadian Alliance policy which states:

We will make the necessary changes to the Divorce Act to ensure that in the event of marital breakdown, the Divorce Act will allow both parents and grandparents to maintain a meaningful relationship with their children and grandchildren, unless it is clearly demonstrated to not be in the best interests of the children.

Because I usually run out of time, I will give the bottom line first. The bottom line for me is that every child has a right to be loved and parented by both parents. A new approach which legally and truly emphasizes children's needs and parental responsibilities should be adopted through new legislation. The typical present application of the Divorce Act prevents that from happening. We say all the good things but somehow or other it does not come out to be that way.

There is a prevalent spirit of divorce in this country. Unstable families and disposable marriages are national problems which have not been sufficiently recognized by the present government.

I believe that the government is responsible for certain things. Sometimes we go way out on the limb on things we try to bear responsibility for and we forget to deal with the trunk or the root of the problems.

We are responsible for infrastructure and the family is social infrastructure. We need to protect our families. We need to do whatever it takes to make that family unit. However that family unit is made up and described, we need to be family friendly. We need to protect that basic foundation of our society.

The legal practice sets the climate. Many arguments have been made that if a couple were to enter a shared parenting agreement it would only heighten the fighting between the two parents involved. If it was the expectation and the norm that these two parents had to deal more equitably with their children, they would go into that relationship expecting that to happen.

It is set up so that if one person complains louder or makes more allegations than the other, then perhaps that person will walk away with the spoils. We set ourselves up for the bitter battle. If we were determined to treat each parent fairly for the sake of the child, we would defuse the situation simply by setting that kind of legal climate. Therefore some of the arguments just do not hold water if we put them into practice.

Over three years have past since the joint committee brought forward its report and no action has been taken, except for another \$1.5 million in consultations trying to find reasons to violate that report. That is a shame.

In too many cases the legal system poorly serves the interests of the children by failing to adequately address parental responsibilities. Everyone is out for their own rights. They selfishly seek their own rights. That is a problem with human nature.

We have to turn this thing in two directions for the honest sake of the children and for the honest right of each parent involved. A new approach that legally and actually emphasizes children's needs over short term parental wants should be taken by placing an emphasis on parental responsibilities with perhaps less emphasis on parental rights.

The best interests of the children should be the primary concern of the courts in the event of marital breakdown. Parental rights should be encouraged. However, the rights of any parent should be subject to the best interests of the children.

• (1820)

I would like to read the first paragraph from a report entitled "Strategy for Reform", which I believe was authored by the former minister of justice. It is wonderful and we should put it into practice. It states:

Canadians agree that when families break down the needs and best interests of children must be the highest priority. Even after divorce or separation, parents do not cease to be parents, and continue to have responsibilities to their children.

What a shocking new idea. The report continues to state:

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The role of the justice system is to ensure that children are given priority during this traumatic period in their lives. Concerns have been raised, however, that the current system is not doing a good enough job and that it must be improved

The date on the report is 1999. The report came out in the last century and still nothing has been accomplished.

The right to be a parent is a right we need to protect on both sides of a divorce settlement. The right to be a parent has been violated many times in our country. The stories the hon. member from the Fraser Valley mentioned of suicides are replicated many times over in our land. Men and even women are sometimes driven beyond their means to be that non-custodial, cheque writing parent. Something needs to be done about that.

Something needs to be done that will not allow a judge to assess a payment to a non-custodial parent, to use an old term that I hope we get away from, of more than half of what the parent makes to go toward child support. This is not right. We are not protecting the family. Each parent is still a part of that family no matter whether they go through a divorce or not.

I believe that if we had written into law what is happening with these judgments in the divorce cases, it would be challenged under the charter of rights, and yet it is still happening.

It is a shame and a self-condemnation on the government for not moving forward with its report. It should have been done if for no other reason, and there are many more, than for the sake of the hurting children.

• (1825)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired. As the motion has not been designated as a votable item the order is dropped from the order paper.

It being 6.25 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.25 p.m.)

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