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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, November 6, 2002

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, November 6, 2002

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sign O Canada, and we will be led by the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

[Editor's Note: Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to a new report issued by the organization Human Rights Watch, since January 2001, 52 Palestinian suicide bombings have killed more than 250 Israeli civilians and injured some 2,000 more.

According to the analysis of Human Rights Watch, these attacks are of such a size and nature that they clearly fall under the category of crimes against humanity, and that those who carry out suicide bombings are not martyrs but war criminals, as are the people who plan such attacks.

International law states that those responsible be held to account. The failure of the political leadership of the Palestinian Authority to exercise authority to prevent or control groups, such as Hamas, the Islamic Jihad and the popular front of the liberation of Palestine, clearly does not meet the standards of international law.

I call upon our government to condemn the armed groups and the complicit political leadership responsible, and demand that they halt the suicide attacks on civilians immediately.

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COAST GUARD

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, internal Coast Guard documents reveal that the Coast Guard station at Vancouver airport was out of service on May 22 of this year. All its search and rescue craft were down. Lives were at risk.

The base provides rescue coverage for crashes on the tidal flats surrounding the airport. Its job is to coordinate the rescue of hundreds of passengers who might be involved in a crash, to take life rafts to the crash site and to pick up survivors.

On May 22 the Coast Guard advised the Rescue Co-ordination Centre and the Vancouver airport that the base was out of service, its vessels inoperable and advised them to find commercial helicopters to ferry life rafts to the site of any possible crash.

Since October 4 there has only been one hovercraft in B.C. That means that the airport is now regularly left unprotected as the remaining hovercraft is out of service for routine inspection and maintenance.

The Vancouver Airport is left with third world emergency rescue coverage. Shame.

* * *

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, November 11 is a day that gives Canadians time to pause and reflect on Canada's history, as well as what Canada is and stands for in the world today. Above all, it is an occasion to remember the valiant men and women who sacrificed their lives in the interests of Canada.

On Remembrance Day we remember the more than 1.5 million Canadians who fought for Canada in World War I, World War II and the Korean War. We recognize the more than 100,000 soldiers who died and the enormous sacrifices made by their families who were split apart by war and tragedy.

We remember the men and women who have sacrificed their lives in the service of peace and who continue to defend our country and our interests today. At the same time, we recognize the reasons they fought, namely the values, freedoms and way of life that we cherish and are privileged to enjoy today. These include the liberties that we take for granted and our ability to actively participate in political, social and cultural life in Canada.

That is why we stop on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month to remember the cost of freedom and to honour those who have paid the price for it.

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SAN GIULIANO DI PUGLIA

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are members of the House who represent towns and villages from across this land who can testify to the special closeness that exists between families and neighbours, especially in rural areas.

It is therefore shockingly clear to the House what the devastating impact would be if those events that occurred a short time ago in San Giuliano di Puglia, Campobasso region of Italy, had occurred in any part of our country.

Today, as a result of the devastating earthquake that rocked the region, there is not one family in the town that has escaped the tragedy of losing a beloved child.

In addition, as winter conditions threaten, nearly 3,100 people are living in tents and local authorities are desperately and courageously trying to deal with emergency conditions.

Throughout this country's history, Canadians have benefited from that special quality of love of family and community that is characteristic of Italians and what they have contributed to Canada. In this spirit of extended family, I would like to express our profound sympathy for the grieving families of San Giuliano di Puglia.

* * *

• (1410)

VETERANS

Mr. Bob Wood (Nipissing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the week Canadians proudly wear the scarlet poppy on our lapels. We do so as a reminder of how much we owe our veterans who served this nation in two world wars, in Korea, the Gulf war and in countless peacekeeping operations around the world.

We were reminded of the true nature of their sacrifice not so many months ago with the tragic loss of four of our own in Afghanistan.

Over the years, our veterans have simply asked that we recognize and remember their service. It seems so very little to ask in return for all they have done for our nation. We, who have inherited that future, remain forever grateful to the veterans of Canada.

It remains incumbent upon us to demonstrate that gratitude by keeping their stories alive, not just for this generation but for generations to come. The stories of our nation give our children the glue of our history and our common values that bind our country together.

Let us keep those stories alive, lest our children forget.

* * *

RAMADAN

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour as the only member of the House of the Islamic faith to announce that today, November 6, is the first day of the holy month of Ramadan.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. The month of Ramadan celebrates when the Holy Quran “was sent down from heaven”.

The fast of Ramadan lasts the entire month. It is a time when Muslims concentrate on their faith and spend time with family and community.

During Ramadan strict restraints are placed on the daily lives of Muslims. They are not allowed to eat or drink during the daylight hours. At sundown the fast is broken with prayer and a meal called the *iftar*.

After the meal Muslims spend time visiting with family and friends. The fast is resumed the next morning.

Ramadan is a time of focus on family and faith. I hope all Canadians take time to experience and learn more about the Islamic faith.

On behalf of the official opposition, I would like to wish all my Muslim brothers and sisters a very joyous celebration of Ramadan.

* * *

FOUR NATIONS CUP

Mrs. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Maple Leaf will be flying proudly in my constituency as Kitchener hosts the Four Nations Cup. Tonight our nation's finest women hockey players will take to the ice as Canada and the United States face off for the first time since Canada's gold medal win in Salt Lake City.

The city of Kitchener is proud to host the Four Nations Cup that will showcase four of the world's best women's hockey countries: Canada, Finland, Sweden and the U.S.A. Women's hockey has become enormously popular in Canada. The Four Nations Cup will certainly help continue the growth of women's hockey at all levels and ultimately encourage more women to play the game.

Canada is the reigning cup champion after claiming victory at last year's Three Nations Cup in Finland. Canada has won five of the six Nation Cup championships, dating back to the inaugural event in 1996.

Kitchener is looking forward to five days of fantastic hockey. I invite everyone to take advantage of this exciting opportunity to cheer on our nation's favourite team. Go Team Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MONSIGNOR JEAN-MARIE FORTIER

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as we speak, the funeral of the former Archbishop of Sherbrooke, Monsignor Jean-Marie Fortier, is taking place in Sherbrooke.

I would like to pay tribute to this great man of the Church, who was totally committed to our community for 28 years. I remember him as a man easy to like and easy to approach, with the best interests of not just his diocese but the entire region at heart. He was a man of faith who retained his simplicity despite the onerous tasks entrusted to him, particularly as the president of the Assemblée des évêques du Québec.

I remember him too as a man of generosity, always ready to listen to anyone, from the humblest to the greatest, wealthy or poor. I will also remember Mgr Fortier presiding over the funeral mass for former Quebec Premier René Lévesque.

On behalf of my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, my most sincere condolences to his grieving family. I thank you again, Monsignor, on behalf of the entire population of Sherbrooke.

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[English]

2002 SYNERGY AWARDS FOR INNOVATION

Ms. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to congratulate two winners of the 2002 Synergy Awards for Innovation announced by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada.

Dr. Vincent Tao and Dr. Allan Tarswell were recognized for their important work on three dimensional imaging of laser radar. This tool measures atmospheric pollution and has the potential to revolutionize all forms of urban mapping.

In a partnership between York University and Optech Incorporated, these outstanding scientists showed that collaboration is an important investment in research and development.

Successful partnerships between universities and industry are good for students and good for Canada.

York University in my riding is one of Canada's leader research institutes.

This award demonstrates the importance of innovation in the knowledge-based economy.

I ask members to please join me in congratulating this winning Synergy partnership which draws together those who produce new knowledge and those who know how to apply it.

* * *

•(1415)

BAMFIELD, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, October 31, about 200 people gathered in Bamfield, a beautiful village on the west coast of Vancouver Island, to celebrate an event that created a cable link across the Pacific Ocean.

In 1902, after 20 years of planning, workers connected 6,000 kilometres of undersea cable linking Bamfield and Fanning Island in the South Pacific. This undertaking, known as the "All Red Route", completely linked the British Empire.

On November 2, two days after the final cable was connected, the message went out, encircling the globe and setting in motion advancements in communications that led to today's fibre optics and satellite technology.

Although the cable station was closed in 1959, the site is now home to the Bamfield Marine Science Centre, one of Canada's leading marine science institutions.

S. O. 31

The centenary celebrations included a message from Queen Elizabeth, the unveiling of a commemorative stamp and a gathering of former cable operators, cable kids and historical enthusiasts.

Bamfield, leading the way into the 20th century with cable communications and now leading the way into the 21st century in marine science research.

* * *

HAY WEST

Mr. John Harvard (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have in Ottawa today two extraordinary gentlemen from Navan, Ontario, Willard and Wyatt McWilliams.

On July 17 last summer the father and son farming duo were discussing the terrible situation of drought stricken farmers in western Canada. After consulting their MP, who happens to be our esteemed House leader, the Hay West initiative was born. Less than four months later, 1,800 farmers in Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia had pledged more than 30,000 tonnes of hay that was shipped to Alberta and Saskatchewan by over 700 rail cars and 160 trucks. Canadian citizens and corporate Canada donated farm equipment, thousands of volunteer hours and over \$1 million. In total, about 1,000 farming families in Alberta and Saskatchewan received the much needed hay thanks to Willard and Wyatt McWilliams.

As chair of the western Liberal caucus, I wish to express my appreciation as well as extend my congratulations to the McWilliams for their ability to show Canadians how things are done in Canada when people are in need.

* * *

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing what passes for democratic revolution in the Liberal Party. Members openly vote against their leadership so they can secretly vote against their leadership when it comes to committee chairs.

While any erosion of Liberal authoritarianism is welcome, it does seem strange that it comes in this way on this issue. It would be stranger still if it stopped at this issue.

If the 56 Liberals who value their own privacy so much mustered the courage to vote against the latest security bill, Bill C-17, which according to the privacy commissioner massively violates the privacy of Canadians, that would indeed be an event of historic proportions.

We await the day when what happened yesterday extends to legislative as well as procedural matters. That will be the day that parliamentary history is truly made.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

DAIRY INDUSTRY

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Deborah Buszard of McGill University and Bertrand Farmer of Quebec's Dairy Herd Analysis Service, have been awarded the Prix Léo-Derikx. This is an award created to acknowledge innovative models for long term partnerships at the pre-competitive phase of research and development.

This McGill University project, started as a means of helping dairy farmers, has developed into a world-class centre of expertise on which the entire Canadian dairy industry depends when decisions need to be made. At present, it receives and analyzes data on more than 13,000 Canadian dairy herds, comprising some 750,000 cows. This represents some 1.2 million milk production records annually.

Working together, the dairy businesses and the award winning academics have proven that great things can come out of effective partnerships. Their success has enriched university training and research programs in Quebec and in Canada, and given them concrete advantages.

Our sincere congratulations to the award winners.

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[English]

GILLER PRIZE

Ms. Sarmite Bulte (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Austin Clarke who last night won the coveted Giller Prize for fiction with his book *The Polished Hoe*.

The Giller Prize is awarded annually to the author of the best Canadian novel or short story collection published in English and is recognized as one of the most prestigious prizes for English language fiction in Canada.

Mr. Clarke is the author of five short story collections and nine novels, most notably *The Origin of the Waves* which won the Rogers Communication Writers' Trust Fiction Prize in 1998.

Canadian authors from all regions and backgrounds have long been recognized as among the best in the world. Our authors continue to create masterful works which appeal to audiences everywhere. We are extremely proud of the excellent calibre of our writers.

I invite all Canadians to join me in congratulating Mr. Austin Clarke for winning the 2002 Giller Prize.

* * *

• (1420)

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want their publicly funded medicare system reformed and modernized and they want it adequately and consistently funded.

Canada however is a federal state in which health care is delivered at the provincial level and these days it is also funded mainly at the provincial level. This means we need strong federal leadership on

this issue, leadership that is willing to work cooperatively with the provinces and the medical community and leadership that is willing to fund a much greater share of the costs in exchange for re-establishing the truly national medicare program that Canadians want.

On health care, Canadians are demanding leadership and cooperation. They will not easily forgive any federal party or leader who turns a national dream into a Kyoto-style federal-provincial dogfight.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

KYOTO PROTOCOL

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister continues to push ahead on his made in Japan Kyoto accord. He has alienated the provinces with his go it alone approach. He has increased uncertainty for investors by proceeding without an implementation plan.

Why is the Prime Minister forging ahead when the provinces, business and Canadians have no idea how the government will reach its made in Japan targets?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have an international obligation. Because we believe in multilateralism, we have to accomplish that.

We will accept the goals of Kyoto and will make a Canadian solution to Kyoto in the next 10 years. We have talked only six years with the provincial governments and with the private sector to achieve that goal.

Seventy-five per cent to 80% of Canadians are in favour of ratification of Kyoto. Canadians are preoccupied with the health of their children, their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's approach is unilateral within the country and unilateral internationally. We are the only country in the western hemisphere proceeding with this accord.

Even as the government pushes ahead for ratification, it tries to renegotiate the terms of the deal. The environment minister recently returned from Delhi where he once again failed to get credit for clean energy exports, a concession on which one-quarter of the government's reduction target depends.

How can the government ask Canadians to ratify this deal when it continues to try and renegotiate it internationally?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to talk about geography. The former leader did not know the way Niagara Falls was falling and this one does not know that Great Britain, France, Denmark, Germany and Italy are part of the western world. Perhaps he should go back to school.

This international agreement is extremely important for future generations. This government does not run away from its international obligations and the health of the children of the future.

Oral Questions

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I do know that western Europe is not in the western hemisphere.

[*Translation*]

The provinces did not buy the government's power point presentation, which did not include any details regarding the implementation, any analysis of the impacts on industry and business, or any estimate of how much Kyoto will cost.

Why is the Prime Minister still refusing to call a first ministers meeting to ensure the support of all the provinces?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the figures were provided and analyzed by officials of all the provincial environment and resources ministries at a conference. There will be another conference in two weeks, if I am not mistaken.

As I said, this is a commitment Canada is making for 2012. Adjustments will be necessary. Because of our efforts, other countries have agreed to accept the concept of the sink in the case of trees. And we are continuing our efforts to gain the support of other countries and ensure that Canada receives credit for exporting non-polluting energy.

• (1425)

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment just cannot stand dissenting opinions on Kyoto. When the University of Alberta wanted a balanced panel to speak about Kyoto, the environment minister refused. He does not want Canadians to hear both sides of the story.

Is the environment minister's Kyoto position so weak that he cannot stand to have Canadians hear both sides of the issue?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I spoke at the University of Calgary to a thousand Calgaryans on the issue of climate change. They in turn had a provincial minister speak. It is perfectly acceptable.

I am looking forward at the University of Alberta in Edmonton to having the University of Alberta choose some of their top people, scientists, economists and others, so that we can indeed have the very balanced panel that he talks about.

I would point out to the hon. member that it is important in a province where medical health officers seem to lose their jobs if they speak out about Kyoto to ensure that it is clear that this is done without prejudice to those who might be on the stage with me.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, here is what the vice-president of the University of Alberta said. We reconfirmed this with her just recently. She said:

It is [the environment minister's] panel. They have selected the participants. We are not co-hosting it. It is important as an academic institution we provide a balanced forum when we choose to co-host.

Why is the environment minister afraid to have both sides of the issue?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the University of Alberta is free to choose other members to sit with me on the panel if it so wishes. However I would point out to the hon. member, who seems quite uninformed as to the true facts of

the situation, that we want to have some interaction with the public who are there as well. We do not simply want to have a debate on the stage and no answering of questions from the floor.

I am quite happy to go there provided the University of Alberta chooses some of those expert people that it has and who the Province of Alberta did not want to hear before it made up its mind on its own plan.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, five days before Public Works—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. It is impossible to hear the hon. member. I know that members like to help one another when it comes to questions and answers. The Minister of Canadian Heritage would like to hear the question from the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie. The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, five days before Public Works officially awarded the contract to organize the former Secretary of State for Amateur Sport's tour, bureaucrats at Canadian Heritage were exchanging e-mails asking that a clause be added to the Everest contract.

Therefore, the negotiations for the contract took place at Canadian Heritage. Given this fact, how can the Minister of Public Works and Government Services say the contract was awarded by his department, when the e-mail paper trail proves that in reality, the contract signed with Everest was negotiated directly by Canadian Heritage?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again I would indicate to the hon. gentleman that in the timeframe to which he is referring, there was in fact no contract. The requisition to provide a contract was received on May 29, and the contract was issued on May 30.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in simple terms, what the minister is saying is that the negotiations took place at Canadian Heritage and then on May 29, the contract was rubberstamped by his department.

Another e-mail reveals that the firm the secretary of state wanted to hire was Everest. The secretary of state's only defence is to say that he did not award the contract, that it was the responsibility of the Department of Public Works. Yet, the second e-mail shows the exact opposite to be true. The real negotiations took place at Canadian Heritage.

Will the Minister of Public Works and Government Services acknowledge that the only defence of the former Secretary of State for Amateur Sport has just fallen apart?

Oral Questions

● (1430)

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whatever a department may do in preparation for submitting a requisition is up to that department. The fact remains that when the requisition comes to the Department of Public Works, the Department of Public Works makes the decision, and it may or may not accept the recommendation of the department.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Canadian Heritage officials were aware of the intentions of the former Secretary of State for Amateur Sport, who wanted Everest to be hired. This they confirmed in an e-mail. We also know that these same officials were negotiating certain clauses of the contract before it was signed.

How can the former Secretary of State for Amateur Sport claim not to have had anything to do with the hiring of Everest, when five days before the contract was awarded these officials at Canadian Heritage were involved in negotiations and very well aware that the minister wanted Everest to be selected?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot in any way comment on what would have gone into the decision making process or recommendation making process of some other department.

When the requisition arrived in public works, it asked for a certain contract to be done. It made a suggestion. It was then up to the officials of public works to decide whether it would accept the suggestion from the department that made the request.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can the Minister of Public Works rise and tell us that everything was done according to the rules of his department, when in fact he ought to instead accept that his predecessor, Alfonso Gagliano, was very much aware of the preferences of the secretary of state, that the negotiations were carried out at Heritage Canada, and that the work had already started?

All he did was rubber-stamp it. He closed his eyes and rubber-stamped what had been done. That is what enables the minister to say today "Everything was done correctly at Public Works". The problem is at Canadian Heritage, and the minister knows it.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have before me the file with respect to this matter. It indicates that the officials in the Department of Public Works conducted themselves appropriately in all of the circumstances. A requisition arrived and they acted upon the basis of

that requisition, using their own good judgment to make the appropriate conclusion.

I would point out that there have been examples in the very recent past where requests or suggestions have in fact been denied and I would refer hon. members to the moratorium that I imposed this summer.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister was asked about landed immigrants and the harassment that some of them are facing at the U.S. border. He said: "If they do not have a Canadian passport, it's no longer my problem. It's their problem".

Immigrants, together with our aboriginal people, built this country. How could the Prime Minister make such an insulting, ignorant statement? How could the Prime Minister dismiss Canada's landed immigrants as footloose itinerants or birds in flight?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I said that in these situations every country has its own regulations about the people who enter a nation. We have ours, the Americans have theirs. The French, the Germans and everybody else have their own internal techniques to receive people entering their country.

As far as Canadians are concerned, they have Canadian passports and we are defending them vis-à-vis the Americans and the validity of the Canadian passport. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has received assurances from the Ambassador of the United States that Canadian passports will be completely acceptable.

If people do not have a Canadian passport and the Americans are asking for something else, I think that as a country we can fight for the passport—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Halifax.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am not asking about Canadian passports. I am asking about the rights of landed immigrants who do not vote. Maybe that is why the Prime Minister does not really care.

Let me remind the Prime Minister that landed immigrants do have rights under the Canadian charter, including the right to equal treatment. When it comes to appointing a governor general, the Prime Minister is praising immigrants from the Peace Tower, but when it is time to defend their rights, the Prime Minister says that it is not his problem.

Will the Prime Minister apologize to Canada's 1.4 million landed immigrants? Will he assure them that the Canadian government will stand up for their rights?

● (1435)

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I simply said that somebody who is not a Canadian citizen is not entitled to a Canadian passport. It is the law of Parliament. It is not me. I am not the one who decides who should have a passport. A passport belongs to a Canadian citizen.

Oral Questions

For those who do not have a passport, it is because they are not Canadian citizens. A passport certifies one's citizenship. When one is a citizen of Canada, then one is entitled to a passport. If one is not a citizen of Canada, there is nothing more that Parliament permits me to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister told landed immigrants that he did not care about their fate at the Canada—U.S. border.

He said “If they do not have a Canadian passport, it is not my problem. Let them become Canadian citizens and then we will protect them”.

Does the Minister of Immigration agree with his leader? Is this the new policy of the Canadian government?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat in French what I said in English. If the hon. member had listened, he could have asked a different question, but I congratulate him on his progress in speaking French. I rose to congratulate him.

One thing is clear. The Canadian passport belongs to Canadian citizens. The Parliament of Canada passed a law to the effect that if a person is not a Canadian citizen, then that person is not entitled to a Canadian passport.

If the hon. member wants to propose a change to Canadian legislation to grant a passport to a person who comes to Canada for a few weeks, perhaps we can look at it, but at this point we are simply complying with the law, in English and in French.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, we accept a truthful answer in either official language.

A spokesman for the immigration department issued 606 ministerial passports to convicted felons on compassionate grounds. The minister stated that whenever a permit is issued, it is done with safety in mind. I doubt that the victims of those crimes or the persons without criminal records denied entry to Canada would be impressed with the minister's compassion.

Can the minister tell us why he has allowed the number of permits issued to convicted felons to rise 62% since 1999, and how many of the 606 were convicted of offences for murder, sexual assault or crimes against children?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it somewhat deplorable that someone who aspires to become the leader of his party would engage in petty politics at the expense of the public.

The fact is that members of his own party are continually asking me to issue ministerial permits. I will not mention specific cases, but the hon. member is definitely not in a position to talk.

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, here is a new one, a politician playing politics. That is exactly what the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is accused of doing.

Canadians have grave concerns about how much pressure the minister used to promote his friend's firm for a half a million dollar contract while he was Secretary of State for Amateur Sport. The Minister of Public Works insists that his department signed the contract but he cannot or will not tell us who is responsible for promoting Groupe Everest in the first place.

With evidence mounting daily that the minister did indeed direct the contract to his buddies at Groupe Everest, will the Prime Minister show us some of his new ethics and mount a real investigation into this?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again to refresh the hon. gentleman's memory, as I have said in the House before, there was a pre-qualified suppliers list. It was available to both the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Department of Public Works. It was established through a competitive process and the particular firm in question here was on that list.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, there is more than just Groupe Everest on that pre-qualified list. Why did some of the other names not come forward, other than just his buddy at Groupe Everest?

The conflict of interest code says: “Public office holders shall not step out of their official roles to assist private entities—”. A growing number of public servants have corroborated each other's claims that the secretary of state did just that, and now he will not even defend his actions here in the House.

Is the government prepared to announce a full investigation into this situation or will it once again just stonewall Canadians?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to say that he cannot make an accusation that the minister does not want to defend himself in the House. He should know the rules of the House. It is the minister who is responsible for his department and in this case the minister responsible for the contract is the Minister of Public Works. If he wants to be in order he will have to follow the rules of the House of Commons.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Lanctôt (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Public Works confirmed that the process begins once the contract has been signed. The contract with Everest is dated May 30, 2000, but the Internet site was in operation as early as May 19, which is two weeks before the contract was signed.

Does the Minister of Public Works admit that Everest did work before the contract was signed, which is unacceptable?

Oral Questions

•(1440)

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would simply point out that in relation to government contracting, if certain firms undertake, on their own behalf, some work in anticipation of a contract they do so at their own risk and there is no guarantee that they will get it.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Lanctôt (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since it is not normal to do work before a contract is signed and since it has been established that the Internet site was already in existence since May 19, 2000, which is two weeks before the contract was signed, could the minister tell us how much money he deducted from the Everest contract for the work done by that firm before the contract was signed, without being authorized to do such work?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I inquired into the procedure here and after a contract is in fact awarded it is up to the client department to decide if any work that may have been done falls within the scope of the contract. If prior work were undertaken I would quite frankly remind all private sector companies that that is a risky practice which they ought not to pursue.

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PRAIRIE FARMERS

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, seven days ago the government was eager to lock up prairie farmers because they sold their own grain. They are still in jail. Yet the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board has been aware for some time that the board is operating illegally by charging the cost of export licences to prairie farmers.

Could he tell us why he locks up prairie farmers but takes no action against the Wheat Board when it breaks the law?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member and all hon. members that any conduct inconsistent with a statute of Canada or a regulation of Canada is subject to prosecution. Quite frankly, if the gentleman has any information that ought to be brought to the attention of the law officers of the Crown, rather than grandstanding, I invite him to do it.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the minister received the information two weeks ago. He created the law that jailed these farmers. He insisted that the farmers go to jail. He has kept farmers in jail for the last week. Why is he so eager to jail farmers and so reluctant to enforce the law when it applies to his own department?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status

Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the correspondence that was first referred to in the House by the member for Yorkton—Melville has in fact been referred to officials and law officers to determine if there is any fact there that merits any further inquiry.

I would also point out to the hon. gentleman, in respect of the farmers who were protesting by means of the conduct which he has referred to, that they had options and alternatives. They themselves have said that they chose this option.

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*[Translation]***GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS**

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the contract awarded to Everest for the tour by the former Secretary of State for Amateur Sport, as the heritage minister said repeatedly yesterday, everything was done in accordance with the standards and procedures in place at Canadian Heritage.

I would like her to tell us again whether, at Canadian Heritage, it is the procedure and practice to negotiate contracts directly with suppliers and then have them approved by Public Works Canada? Is that the procedure followed in her department?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the heritage minister acknowledged yesterday that she gave credence to everything her officials told her. I remind her that these are the officials who confirmed that the former Secretary of State for Amateur Sport had made representations in favour of Everest.

Could she tell us whether she also gives credence to what her officials tell her when they incriminate the former secretary of state, or does she listen only when it suits her?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no one in the department has implied anything of the sort.

* * *

*[English]***TERRORISM**

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, ever since the Prime Minister's unfortunate Beirut rendezvous with the chief of Hezbollah, the Deputy Prime Minister and the foreign affairs minister have said that the Liberals' soft stance on Hezbollah is the same as Britain's. That is not so. I have obtained the list which shows the 30 prohibited terrorist groups in Great Britain. Hezbollah's military wing is on that list but, at least as of yesterday, Hezbollah's military wing is not on Canada's list of seven banned groups.

Why do these ministers continue to say it is?

Oral Questions

●(1445)

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I must remind the hon. member that when the Prime Minister was in the room of which he speaks the American ambassador was sitting virtually right beside the gentleman of whom he speaks. We must bear these things in mind. In terms of international affairs, sophisticated people recognize we must work together to resolve these problems.

Second, I am finally pleased that the hon. member has recognized that the United Kingdom makes a distinction between the military wing of Hezbollah and its social wing, which is what we do in Canada, and finally the hon. member has got the point.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we will take accuracy over sophistication any day.

The minister continues to say that the terrorist group Hezbollah, its military wing, is banned in Canada. I now have the list. We have showed it clearly is not. The military wing of Hezbollah is not on the list of banned groups in Canada as it is in Great Britain. Why not?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the military wing—and finally we are speaking of the correct wing and I appreciate the member's precision in this respect—is listed under the UN regulations. It cannot raise money in Canada; it is banned in Canada.

As the hon. member will know, anyone conducting terrorist activities in Canada is guilty of a criminal offence and repressed under the Criminal Code of Canada.

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[Translation]

CROWN CORPORATIONS

Mr. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, I asked a question on the problem posed by the fact that a number of businesses refuse to accept \$100 and \$50 bills. Today, I am putting a modified version of my question to the minister responsible for crown corporations.

Is there a policy requiring crown corporations to accept the money printed by the Crown? If so, are agents of crown corporations, such as postal outlets, required to comply with this obligation, and if not, what action will the government take in the coming months to settle the issue?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada Post is required to accept \$50 and \$100 bills, but the agents of crown corporations do not have the same obligations, because they are private businesses and it is up to them.

I should point out that in Toronto, on Saturday, I paid my Canada Post account in cash with a \$50 bill. It is obvious that it is up to the business providing the services.

* * *

[English]

SOCIAL HOUSING

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government claims to be committed to affordable housing and

ending homelessness, yet one year after the housing agreement was signed homeless Canadians are as desperate as ever and no housing is in sight.

The government cannot even get the numbers right, yesterday citing 14,000 people according to the census count when in reality the number is 250,000 homeless Canadians.

How many more frozen bodies do there have to be before the government comes to its senses to end homelessness and house Canadians as it has promised to do repeatedly but has failed to do?

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to see that Statistics Canada is providing us with the numbers that we need. We have a lot of community agencies that are already giving us the numbers that we need.

I have to say that under the homelessness file we have built several transitional houses and support houses, and community groups and the private sector are very happy with the way that it is going.

* * *

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

November 1 to 7 is Down Syndrome Awareness Week and a chance to look at the challenges facing persons with disabilities, specifically intellectual disabilities. Poverty, cuts to educational and income supports, cuts to the DTC, and lack of training and paid work are daily hurdles facing our most vulnerable citizens.

Will the minister give the social union agreement some real meaning by funding long term job coaches and assisted employment programs so that people can get and keep real jobs in their communities?

●(1450)

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, working with the provinces and territories, we have a plan of action that will increase employability for Canadians with disabilities and focus on income as well as disability supports.

It is my hope that at the next meeting of social services ministers in November this will continue to be on the agenda and that together we will build an active labour market strategy specifically for Canadians with disabilities, responding to the hon. member's question.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, I have a political question for the political minister of Nova Scotia, who also happens to be the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

Oral Questions

Recently his department advertised a job opening in Halifax. The job description indicates that if people come from the political minister's own county of Digby, their applications will be considered. However, if people come from my county, Cumberland county, their applications will automatically be rejected even if they are more qualified for the job. My county is closer to the job than his county.

My question is to the political minister: Is this politics?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. It is relevant to the President of the Treasury Board. I will give her the information and she will respond when she next returns to the House.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, it is not relevant to the Treasury Board. This is the government that is supposed to be running the country, not the Public Service Commission and not the Treasury Board.

There is another job that was posted just five days ago. Again if people live in the political minister's county of Digby they can apply, and again if people live in my county their applications will be rejected.

No matter what the reason, will the political minister use his political power and authority to ensure that all Nova Scotians have equal opportunity when it comes to Government of Canada jobs in Nova Scotia?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a correction I would like to say that I am the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, not the political minister. We are all politicians, some cheaper than others but all honourable I am sure.

As for the rules established by Treasury Board, I do not have the details and I will refer this to the President of the Treasury Board, but I understand that they were established under the Conservative regime some time ago.

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AGE OF CONSENT

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, recently when addressing the issue of changing the age of consent, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice told the House that "there are many social and cultural differences that have to be reflected in that law".

One would ask, what in the world? Could this parliamentary secretary stand up and just tell us exactly which cultural differences he is talking about?

Mr. Paul Harold Macklin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I answered this question yesterday in the House, but it does deal with the various cultures within our multicultural society that have different sexual mores, and they are taken into consideration. They are represented and reflected by the provinces and the territories at the meetings that are currently going on.

We are going to look at broad ways of dealing with the issues. The minister is going to follow up on these issues and see what we might

be able to do, looking at the predators that are involved in these matters.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this is just hard to believe. After all, we are in Canada. Surely we could have a made in Canada policy. He talks about getting together with the provinces. This is under the federal Criminal Code. Obviously it falls under federal jurisdiction.

The government is holding up legislation for the protection of our children because of cultural considerations, and he now says that we all have different sexual mores. I can hardly believe that. Even insinuating that this kind of behaviour might be appropriate or acceptable in Canada is unbelievable.

I would like the member to stand up and answer this question. Which culture is it that allows the sexual exploitation of children?

Mr. Paul Harold Macklin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is sheer nonsense.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. I know hon. members are trying to help the parliamentary secretary with an answer, but I think he will give an answer on his own and we have to be able to hear it. The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Mr. Paul Harold Macklin: Mr. Speaker, we are all opposed to sexual exploitation of children and the minister has clearly indicated that he will look at all types of measures and bring forward something toward the end of this year.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage just rose and told the House that nobody in her department, none of her officials, had ever incriminated the secretary of state for having pressured them to choose Everest.

How can the minister make such an outrageous statement, when the former director of the task force on amateur sport, Roger Farley, wrote in an e-mail message dated March 17, 2000, and I quote, "Everest is the firm that the secretary of state wants to hire. It has a standing offer with Public Works Canada. I do not have more information. I would like to meet them next week to see what expertise they can provide".

• (1455)

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all that was said, according to the department, was that procedures that have existed for years were to be followed.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are limits to what can be said here. We ask her the following question. How is it that officials incriminated the secretary of state, yet she overlooked it? She replies that nobody incriminated the secretary of state.

Oral Questions

Well, not only was it said, but it was also written. How can she rise as Minister of Canadian Heritage and make such an outrageous statement, unless she is trying to cover up for her colleague and the government?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the information I received from my department was that everything was complied with, including the procedures for deadlines, particularly because the contract decision was made at Public Works.

* * *

[English]

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it has been brought to my attention that funds set aside to increase security at our borders are being used to fill holes in the CCRA budget. Customs management is being forced to cook the books to cover sick leave and overtime. Canada's borders are barely able to operate.

How can the government say that it is taking border issues seriously when it is shuffling funds away from security to cover up Canada Customs and Revenue Agency mismanagement?

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I reject completely what the member has just said. In fact, we have received additional resources. We have hired additional people. We have equipment on order. Our borders are functioning well. They are well protected.

From time to time CCRA management uses its resources to ensure that we are functioning properly and efficiently and I am proud of the job they do.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, once again the consistency of this minister on the issue is the fact that she still does not know what is happening at our borders. She should take the time to visit with some of these customs agents to find out what exactly is happening.

Dangerous incidents occur daily at our borders. Customs officers still do not have the equipment to enforce the Criminal Code.

Before a customs officer dies in the line of duty, will the minister finally show some leadership and commit to supplying firearms to our customs officers?

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the member opposite that I have visited customs officers at our seaports, at our airports and at our land borders, remote and large and small. I can state that they have the tools they need. They do not need guns. They are not policemen. They are acting in the public interest in Canada. They have the tools they need to do the job.

* * *

AFRICA

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, southern Africa is currently facing a major humanitarian crisis. The governments of several southern African countries have declared national disasters due to actual and anticipated food shortages.

This year, people in a number of countries in Africa, including refugees and internally displaced people, still have great unmet needs, with several million children going hungry.

Could the Minister for International Cooperation please inform the House of what the government is doing to address these very urgent needs?

Hon. Susan Whelan (Minister for International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is deeply concerned about the crisis facing several of the south African countries. On Monday I had the opportunity to meet with Jim Morris, who is the executive director of the World Food Program, inform him of our continued commitment to address this crisis and announce that Canada would be contributing an additional \$7.9 million immediately, raising our total from \$34.2 million to \$42.1 million, to deal with the famine in southern Africa.

The government is very concerned and is committed to dealing with humanitarian crises. I want to thank the hon. member for raising this issue so that all members can be aware of the situation.

* * *

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Vancouver International Airport has been operating since October 4 without adequate marine rescue capability.

The minister is now panicking and planning the purchase of an aging hovercraft, which served as a passenger ferry, for conversion to a search and rescue hovercraft.

Why is the minister intent on purchasing a relic to perform marine search and rescue?

● (1500)

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Coast Guard is part of the rescue package that is provided at Vancouver International Airport. The primary responsibility is the airport's itself.

Along with every other agency in the area, we have formed part of the response and relief program, with a brand new \$25 million hovercraft. A backup hovercraft that has been ordered is being purchased and we are making plans in our capital plans to replace that one with a new one in the years to come.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the hovercraft I am talking about is this replacement. This hovercraft operated as a passenger ferry in a relatively sheltered area. Senior Coast Guard officials have advised that the craft may not be able to operate in the sea conditions off Vancouver airport. Giving this passenger ferry to the Coast Guard is akin to giving a school bus to the fire department.

How does the minister justify the purchase of this relic for Coast Guard search and rescue?

Oral Questions

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I should first point out that this vessel is a backup vessel and that senior Coast Guard officials have designed the requirements needed, have evaluated the vessel and have indicated to me that it is the vessel that they need to do the job. I agreed with them and we are going to supply the Coast Guard with that vessel.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Heritage tells us that her department negotiated all contracts before they were given the OK by Public Works.

Might I know whether it was indeed her department which gave Everest permission to start work two weeks before the contract was authorized and to access the Department of Canadian Heritage web site? I imagine that they needed permission before they could access the site. People do not just come along and go into a departmental web site to work on it. Could she, who claims to know everything, answer this specific question?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the same answer as before.

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[English]

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Rumour has it that as a result of heightened interest in parliamentary procedures, another special committee may be established to modernize the Standing Orders. Is this so?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that all parties have agreed to a special take note debate, actually two evenings thereof, dedicated to the modernization of our parliamentary institutions.

There is also an understanding that we will have phase two of the modernization committee, as I had recommended to my counterparts several weeks ago and, as a matter of fact, as was listed in the first report of modernization some 18 months back.

* * *

[Translation]

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with all the private ATMs around now, and the exorbitant fees they charge, consumers often have no choice but to pay up to \$4.50 per transaction.

For low income people, whose transactions are generally for small amounts, these charges can amount to more than 20% of the amount they withdraw, an exorbitant rate.

Does the Minister of Industry intend to bring in legislation requiring financial institutions to provide this service and to eliminate the unacceptably high charges involved? Will he bring the banks back to their senses?

[English]

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. I know it is an issue that he cares about. That is the reason the government is also concerned about these ATM fees. This is why the rules require that when an ABM operator imposes a surcharge, consumers are given an onscreen notice of the fees and an opportunity to cancel the transaction.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me ask further on this issue because that answer will not satisfy consumers who are being gouged by charges at private ATMs and facing upward of \$5.00 per financial transaction.

The Canadian Bankers Association says it is about consumers' choice. Well, in areas like my riding where banks have closed nine branches since 1995, consumers have no choice.

We want to know, what are the plans by the government for bringing in regulations to protect consumers from private ATMs and exorbitant financial transaction fees?

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is evident from the hon. member's question that she did not follow the Bill C-8 debate where we took a number of measures to help consumers deal with these particular concerns. I know the hon. member will take the time to review Bill C-8 and she will find that many measures have already been taken.

* * *

• (1505)

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Rex Barnes (Gander—Grand Falls, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration denies any involvement in the awarding of a contract by the Department of Public Works to his friend's company, Groupe Everest. Ministerial aides do not wake up in the morning and decide to take it upon themselves to get involved in contract negotiations, especially negotiations with a company owned by the boss's friend.

First, if he attempted a hands-off policy on this contract, why was his aide directly involved in approving an amendment to that contract? Second, would the minister tell the House on whose authority Patrick Doyon was acting when he became involved in the Everest contract?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again I would point out to the hon. gentleman that whatever activity may have occurred within a requisitioning department, there is nothing legally binding that holds the government until a contract is actually approved and signed, and that is a function that is performed by the Department of Public Works, not by any of the other departments of government.

If a private sector company does something in anticipation, it is on its own responsibility.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Rafael Hipolito Dominguez Mejia, President of the Dominican Republic.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 10 petitions.

* * *

VETERANS WEEK

Hon. Rey Pagtakhan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of State (Science, Research and Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Government of Canada to reflect on the place Canada's veterans hold in our nation's history.

How fitting that we interrupt the usual business of this chamber to pay homage to our veterans within the walls of this very noble institution, the House of Commons, where we stand on guard for everything Canada stands for.

Yesterday the government launched Veterans Week, which culminates next Monday, November 11 when at the 11th hour a grateful nation once more commemorates Remembrance Day; that we may pause in tribute to them for their sacrifices and achievements in the service of country; that we may reflect on the human values they fought to preserve: freedom, peace and equality; that we may cherish their stories of valour and utter disregard for personal danger.

Whether they went in harm's way to destroy the evils of tyranny or terrorism, or to contribute to the collective security of a people as mandated by the United Nations, they served with passionate dedication and magnificent courage because they knew they were fighting for democratic values, for human dignity.

A first world war veteran, Mike Mountain Horse, would later write:

When duty called, we were there; and when we were called forth to fight for the cause of civilization, our people showed all the bravery of our warriors of old.

During Veterans Week we are called upon to remember all this and to renew our unending commitment to our veterans, to care for them as much as they took care of our nation during its time of greatest need. Forever we shall owe them a debt of gratitude.

They helped build the Canada of today. They gave deeper meaning to the values for which we are known throughout the world:

Routine Proceedings

a champion of peace, a defender of freedom and a conscience for equality.

All of them had in mind coming home to a country they loved, to live out the future they were fighting to protect, and to live out the dreams they dreamed before their country called. Many, far too many, would not get to see those dreams become a reality. But it was their service and their sacrifice that gave us our future and our children's future.

This year's theme for Veterans Week as depicted in our poster is "Remembering Our Past, Preserving our Future". Our challenge is to ensure that their story is shared with all Canadians, especially our youth who will carry the torch of remembrance for future generations.

In pursuit of this challenge, it is my honour to inform the House today of the government's decision to create a new Book of Remembrance that will take its place with the others in the Memorial Chamber in the Peace Tower of Canada's Parliament.

Currently there exist six Books of Remembrance containing the names of all Canadians who died in battle outside Canada since Confederation. There is one book obviously missing. It is my honour to announce today the need for its creation, a seventh book which will contain the names of peacekeepers and soldiers who have served and died since 1947.

The recent tragic accident in Afghanistan that took the lives of four of our soldiers reminded all Canadians of the ongoing sacrifices asked of our men and women in uniform. All have toiled in the service of peace. Tragically, a considerable number of them have died in duty throughout the decades.

They are equally worthy of a place in a Book of Remembrance tentatively titled "In the Service of Peace". We anticipate to complete and install it in 2004, during Veterans Week of that year.

It is our duty to remember the supreme sacrifice made by those who served our nation during its time and the world's time of greatest need. It is further our duty to keep our individual memory of them forever alive in our collective memory as a nation, a nation committed to humanity.

May we continue to dedicate ourselves to the human values for which our veterans, old and young, fought so bravely and which today we cherish and protect.

May the words "Lest we forget" continue to be our watchwords in these challenging times.

N'oublions jamais.

• (1510)

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the first day of Veterans Week 2002, I stated in the House that Canada's veterans are the pride of our country. That is no idle statement. The fact is that is the foundation of our party's veterans affairs policy. Canada's vets are the pride of this country, not just because of their sacrifice and service during the war, but because of their continuing sacrifice to Canadian society, not just after the war but indeed even until this day.

Routine Proceedings

For example, I established 12 zones for the distribution of the Queen's medals. A vet was selected from each zone. I am very proud to say that five of those selections were vets who had not only put their lives on the line, but they have also served their country since. They have yet to receive their medals but that will happen shortly after the Remembrance Day service.

We have many memorials in honour of the sacrifice made by the soldiers, the men and women who died in the world wars. The poppies we wear are the present day testimony to our vets.

I was really proud yesterday, as were all members of the House, to stand and applaud the two gentlemen who were in the gallery. I believe they were both over a century in age. One of the gentlemen had also served time as a prisoner of war. He came here at my colleague from Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys' expense. In my mind we have never properly addressed that veteran's claim to all of the things he deserves as a result of his being a prisoner of war.

This year's theme is "Remembering Our Past, Preserving Our Future". Ten years ago or maybe more, the theme for Remembrance Day was "If You Can't Remember War, Think of Peace".

I am sure other members in the House remember, as I do, the dates of September 10, 1939; Sunday morning, December 7, 1941; and August 19, 1942. I was pleased to join the minister and other members to honour the Dieppe raid and veterans on the 60th anniversary of that date. What about June 6, 1944? That 60th anniversary is coming up.

We could not be here today on the foundation upon which we stand without the sacrifices made by our vets in the past. Perhaps the most common of all the slogans for Remembrance Day is "Lest We Forget". Those immortal words that were penned by a Canadian army officer have rung through all our schools since the echoes of time. Lest we forget.

I remember two decades when in this country people sadly did forget. May that never happen again. I remember fighting this in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, Canadian television programs that were being aired were stating that Billy Bishop had not really been a good pilot and had not shot down as many planes as had been claimed. Lest we forget. Let us not go down that road again.

What about the RCAF and the program condemning our brave men? They were here yesterday. It was claimed that the Canadian air force simply dropped its bombs wherever it liked and then hightailed it to home base. Lest we forget in this century, that that never happens again.

I am pleased with the minister's announcement and congratulate him and his government. It is great. I am glad to see recognition for the people who served in Korea. It was not a police action, but indeed it was a war. It was a war that took hundreds of Canadian lives.

This is not just rooted in our past. We will in this present day have an ongoing legacy. We are not done fighting for who we are and what we believe in.

●(1515)

No Canadian wants to see another soldier dead. May this day and this week be a constant reminder that the future is not yet written. It is up to us to design that future and begin that future today.

I was pleased that the House saw fit to fly the flag at half mast. I have already received comments from the provinces and municipalities and they also will follow that. I want to thank the people on both sides of the House. May that forever be part of the tradition of November 11.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to join with my colleagues in this House on the occasion of this Week to express the appreciation I and all of the Bloc Québécois have for our veterans.

Before saying a few words about Veterans' Week, I would like to tell the minister that we approve of his intention to create a seventh Book of Remembrance to go with the six others already in the Memorial Chamber here in the Parliament buildings.

Veterans' Week, November 5 to 11, is an opportunity to pay tribute to all the men and women who have served Canada and Quebec in war and in peace. Each year, Quebecers and Canadians remember the men and women whose heroic efforts have given this country its heritage of democracy and tolerance and have helped our two nations grow. Quebecers and Canadians are indebted to all veterans for their sacrifices in defending freedom and seeking world peace.

This year we also need to pay tribute to the Quebecers and Canadians serving their country at this time around the world in various peace keeping missions, and in increasing numbers. We are grateful to them all and to their families.

The theme of Veterans' Week for 2002 is, "Remembering our Past, Preserving our Future". It focuses on the importance of youth remembering the past for coming generations, and the hope that they will never forget the sacrifices and accomplishments of Quebecers and Canadians in building our two nations.

Today, I would like to pay tribute to one veteran in particular from Sorel-Tracy, in my riding, who celebrated his 85 birthday on November 4. His name is Léopold Bérard, and he has done so much for the Sorel-Tracy Legion. He is a man who is very involved in his community, and at 85, he is exceptionally dynamic. I wish him the best of health. On behalf of all of the legionnaires from the Sorel-Tracy region, I wish him the best on the occasion of his birthday.

I would like to make a brief aside. Léopold and the whole team at the Sorel-Tracy branch of the Canadian Legion have often told us that the government should look after the needs of our legions. It is all well and good to say that young people must remember, but the legions must have the financial means to educate young people.

Routine Proceedings

The lack of financial support for each of these small legions forces members of the legion to canvass or organize fundraising events to ensure the survival of their small facilities where they can get together. If the government looked after their needs and created a small fund to support these legions, it would be greatly appreciated and very useful in allowing these legionnaires, these people who want to evoke the memory of veterans, to do so without the constant need to ask for handouts to make ends meet.

The purpose of Veterans' Week is to recognize the immense sacrifices made by veterans, including those who have served and continue to serve in the numerous peacekeeping operations around the world.

This week should also serve to remind us of the triumphs and accomplishments of these wonderful people who are working for the wellbeing of our communities. Let us never forget.

In closing, I would like to quote from the minister, who at the end of his speech said:

Mr. Speaker, may the words "Lest we forget", continue to be our watchwords in these challenging times. N'oublions jamais.

● (1520)

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today on behalf of the New Democratic Party to reflect on the importance of Veterans Week. On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, members of Parliament will join our constituents and other citizens to pay respects to Canada's sons and daughters who paid the ultimate price while serving their country.

In my case, I will participate with armed forces personnel in my community, with members of the Royal Canadian Legion, in particular with veterans and members of Scotia Branch Legion, of which I am honoured to be an honorary member, and other veterans from across Nova Scotia in laying our wreaths and paying our respects to those who sacrificed their lives in service to their country and to the values of freedom and peace.

Whether in World War I, World War II, the Korean conflict, the Gulf war or countless peace missions, we are indebted to our men and women who have risked and who, in many cases, lost their lives to defend democracy.

We take this opportunity to pay tribute to our first nations veterans who fought and died, and who have yet to receive full and proper recognition for their service in Canada's armed forces.

Last week when I placed this poppy on my lapel I walked from this Chamber under the Peace Tower to the National War Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. I paused to pay my respects and pledged my continued commitment and the commitment of my party to the pursuit and defence of peace.

However, I did not stop there. I continued down Elgin Street to Confederation Park and repeated this same pledge before our National Aboriginal Veterans Memorial.

No words today can adequately convey our indebtedness to all the veterans of this nation. The poppy I bear on my lapel I wear with humility and with pride.

As we stand together to express our gratitude to our veterans who have served with dignity, we must also express our appreciation to those they left behind, to their mothers and sisters and other family members, to their neighbours who worked to support the war effort on the home front, in the factories, in the fields and in the hospitals while also caring for their families.

On Remembrance Day we make a special point of expressing our heartfelt thanks but throughout the year and throughout our lifetime we must never forget. Parliamentarians and a grateful nation must never forget. It is the only way to ensure that the sacrifices of our veterans were not in vain. It is the only way to ensure that freedom and lasting peace become a reality. Let us never forget.

● (1525)

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege to rise today in the House in support of Canada's greatest national heroes. As we begin Veterans Week, our thoughts turn to the brave souls who sacrificed their youthful innocence to fight for King and country.

As a young girl, I watched two of my brothers join the war effort. It was a very different time. There was a sense of duty that extended to all Canadians, a belief that we would not stand idle as the freedom of the world was in peril.

My family was among the luckiest, as both my brothers returned back from the war safe and sound.

Too many families lost their brothers, their fathers and their sons.

November 11 is as much about remembering those fallen Canadians as it is about honouring those who remain with us this day. It is about ensuring that we do everything in our power to preserve peace in the world, while remaining vigilant in the event that our efforts fail.

All in the House have borne witness to the recent horrors of war.

The campaign in Afghanistan, a part of the larger war on terrorism, was costly for Canadians and some of their families. The loss of those brave Canadian soldiers was a terrible reminder of the cost of the war.

Yesterday in the House, Mr. Speaker, you honoured and brought to our attention the presence of Mr. Paul Métivier, the 102 year old World War I veteran, who enlisted in the army in 1917. Also in the gallery was Lieutenant-Colonel Al Trotter who flew 44 missions over Europe during World War II and who was a prisoner of war.

It robs us of our best and our brightest. It asks us as a nation to make the ultimate sacrifice and many of them have.

There is something truly exceptional about a citizen whose love of country is so strong and so unwavering that they are willing to risk their lives for its defence. We must never forget those who were in the Korean war, the Gulf war and our peacekeepers who have done so much around the world.

Routine Proceedings

The men and women of our armed forces, today as always, have offered themselves as the first line of defence for our borders and as the ambassadors of our nation's most cherished values. They are the embodiment of duty and courage. They are the best of their generation and the personification of what it truly means to be Canadian.

It is sometimes difficult for us to look at veterans today as the vibrant young men and women they once were. Many veterans are too modest of their accomplishments. Few will allow themselves to be called heroes. Their view is that they did what needed to be done and that there was no question about it. They do not say "We made sacrifices". They just say "We did what we could for Canada". Even those who lost friends or family will say that if they had to make the choice again, they would don their Canadian Forces uniform without hesitation. That is why we honour them.

For many of them it has been 50, 60 or even 80 years since they last put down a weapon, but their ageless courage and love of country still burns inside them.

Each Remembrance Day I have the honour and privilege to participate in our ceremonies in my riding of Saint John, New Brunswick. This Friday, once again I will visit the high schools, and I say this for the Minister of Veterans Affairs, to speak to the students once again about the sacrifices that were made for them and for all of us.

Every year, I regret to say, that there are fewer veterans who are able to join with us, but that said, there is always a proud contingent on hand. Even those veterans who are now waging a private battle against time and age stand in the often harsh Canadian climate to remember their fallen comrades. They stand ramrod straight and their salutes are just as crisp as a new recruit. There is a pride both for what they did and who they became.

Canada was a young nation when we were first called to war and it was our contribution, far greater than a country of our size would have expected to give, that earned the respect of the world.

• (1530)

Still today the nations of Europe remember the brave young Canadians who liberated them from the clutches of the Nazi regime. Still today school children from Newfoundland to British Columbia pin poppies to their jackets and are part of our cadets that attend the services.

Still today we gather in silence at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month. We will never stop thanking them for we owe them a debt of thanks that can never be repaid. We will remember them.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

BILL C-14

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade on Bill C-14, An Act providing for controls on the export, import or transit across Canada of rough diamonds and for a

certification scheme for the export of rough diamonds in order to meet Canada's obligations under the Kimberley Process, with amendments.

* * *

[*English*]

CHILD PREDATOR ACT

Mr. Jim Pankiw (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Ind.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-298, an act to provide that persons who commit a sexual offence involving a child serve the entire sentence imposed without early release or parole and be found to be child predators, and to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and the Criminal Code.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the child predator act would prevent any unescorted temporary absence, day parole, full parole or statutory release being granted to a person who has committed a child predator offence and would ensure that the full term of the sentence is served in custody in every case of a child predator offence.

Furthermore, this bill, the child predator act, would allow the court to order an offender who is found to be a child predator to be held in custody for an indeterminate period of time, which is where they belong.

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

* * *

• (1535)

CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL TRADE TRIBUNAL ACT

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-299, an act to amend the Canadian International Trade Tribunal Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the enactment amends the Canadian International Trade Tribunal Act to provide for the appointment of a nominee of Canadian labour organizations as one of the permanent members of the tribunal.

It is a common sense idea and I am sure members would support it with enthusiasm.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move that the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House on October 30, 2002, be concurred in without debate.

For the benefit of members, I will explain that this is the report dealing with the reform of private members' business.

The Speaker: Is it agreed.

Some hon. members: Agreed

Points of Order

(Motion agreed to)

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON NON-MEDICAL USE OF DRUGS

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the membership of the Special Committee on Non-Medical Use of Drugs be modified as follows: Greg Thompson for André Bachand.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order regarding question period. I deferred this to permit the Remembrance Day motion. I thank Mr. Speaker for his indulgence in that regard. I am sure all members, who were waiting for the Remembrance Day, motion are probably even more grateful.

I rise in regard to two incidents that occurred during question period to bring them to the attention of the Chair. I quote to Mr. Speaker Citation Nos. 406 and 412 of Beauchesne's.

Citation 406 states:

A question may not be asked of a Member who is no longer a Minister, seeking information with regard to transactions during that person's term of office.

It says a little later, more particularly in No. 410:

The subject...of questions must be within the...responsibility of the Government or the individual responsibilities of Ministers.

In Citation No. 412 it states:

A question may not be asked of a Minister in another capacity, such as being responsible for a province...

I now then draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker, pages 426 and 427 of Marleau and Montpetit. The title, if we go back to page 424, is "Principles and Guidelines for Oral Questions".

Clearly, if one goes to page 426, it says, at the bottom of the page:

These two statements, along with some of the guidelines adopted by the House in 1965, are used today by the Speaker as a reference in managing the Question Period. In summary, when recognized in Question Period, a Member should...

ask a question that is within the administrative responsibility of the government or the individual Minister addressed.

Then I draw the attention of Mr. Speaker, to page 427, at approximately the middle of the page, where it says that the questions must not:

—address a Minister's former portfolio or any other presumed functions, such as party or regional political responsibilities...

During question period I indicated, and perhaps one would refer to this as heckling, to Mr. Speaker on two occasions that in fact these rules were breached by those asking questions. An hon. member asked a question of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration regarding his previous portfolio as secretary of state for another department, not secretary of state within the same department.

The second question was asked of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. A question, repeated in a supplementary question, was asked of the minister regarding his responsibilities as the political minister for Nova Scotia.

Mr. Speaker will know of course that it is impossible for a minister to answer these questions with any detail because it offends the rules of this House. What I draw to the attention of Mr. Speaker is that those questions, in my opinion, should have been interrupted and not have been permitted, when someone seeks this kind of information in a way that is against the rules of the House. Otherwise we have the very unfortunate situation, such as we had today. When a minister does not reply, the next questioner says that the minister refused, as if the minister has any choice but to respect the rules of this honourable chamber. Then we have the curious situation where someone who offends the rules by asking an improper question is not punished and the minister, who was prevented from answering the question because of the same rules, is denigrated publicly for having failed to do so.

That is not right. I draw this to the attention of the Chair. Mr. Speaker might want to review the blues or the informal *Hansard*, as we sometimes refer to it, with a view to stopping this practice in the future so that ministers are not subjected to this kind of intimidation.

• (1540)

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to make sure we are clear on this. I will not comment on the first set of questions, but I will on the second one, which was a general question to the minister.

Usually what we see here is the minister responsible coming to the defence of the one to whom the question might be pointed. It happens often, if new members, in particular, or anybody are not exactly sure of whose responsibility it is. Sometimes over there that is hard to know. Usually the minister responsible gets up. However today, because it was a very difficult question to answer, we saw the minister floundering, nobody coming to his defence, so he answered the question.

I think what is happening here is that the charge is not against those answering the question. The charge by the House leader of the government is against you, Mr. Speaker, because what he is saying is that you should have interrupted and it is your fault this occurred. I leave it at that.

The Speaker: The Chair has had an opportunity of course, while the government House leader raised the issue, to look at the authorities that he has cited. Certainly the Chair is aware of some of these rules and practices respecting question period, which the hon. government House leader has pointed out.

I must say I was surprised by the question to the minister; I think the question was to the political minister for Nova Scotia. I had no idea who that was. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans stood up and I recognized him to give an answer to the question, but as was pointed out by the hon. member for St. John's West, sometimes a question is directed to one minister and another minister answers for whatever reasons. It is not for the Chair to speculate on those reasons.

Routine Proceedings

I agree with the government House leader that the practice has usually been to insist that questions be directed to a particular minister or to the government in general, but not to a political minister. What I am prepared to do in the circumstances is have a look at the blues and come back to the House on this matter.

The other question in respect of the former minister I did not detect as being directed to that minister, but in fact to another minister concerning the conduct of the other minister, but I will review the blues and come back to the House on this matter in due course.

I want to thank both hon. members for their kind interventions and their assistance to the Chair in dealing with these matters. As is always the case, the Chair always appreciates this advice.

• (1545)

PRIVATE MEMBER'S MOTION NO. 231

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, could ask for the indulgence of the House and ask for unanimous consent to allow me to withdraw my private member's motion, M-231, from the order of precedence? There is a votable private member's bill that will be coming forward that deals with my issue. I feel it is only right and proper to withdraw my motion, but I need the consent of the House.

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this appears to be correct and I do not object on the face of it. I have just had a quick consultation with the chief government whip. Normally House leaders are notified, or whips notify each other, so that we are not surprised by having an item revoked where one political party could not consult their own colleagues to see whether this is agreeable in a general way with all political parties.

This one appears to be acceptable, and I am willing to provide my unanimous consent having had that consultation, but only because the chief government whip was immediately available for that consultation. Perhaps I should alert colleagues that we have the usual practice of meeting on Tuesday afternoons, where we have these kinds of meetings. We will give our consent on this one.

The Speaker: Does the House give its consent to the request of the hon. member for Brandon—Souris?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion withdrawn)

* * *

PETITIONS

COAST GUARD

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from many citizens from various locations in Burnaby, British Columbia. The petitioners bring to the attention of the House that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the government no longer provide sufficient resources to the coast guard for staffing and equipment so it can adequately do its job. They point to the tragic incident at the entrance to the Fraser River last summer where this was very evident.

They request that Parliament direct the government to separate the coast guard from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and provide it with the necessary staff and resources to do its job.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I wish to present two petitions on behalf of the citizens of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

The first petition calls upon Parliament to protect children by taking all necessary steps to ensure that all materials which promote or glorify pedophilia or sado-masochistic activities involving children are outlawed.

GASOLINE ADDITIVES

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the second petition calls upon Parliament to protect the health of seniors and children and save our environment by abandoning the disputed gas additive MMT as it creates smog and enhances global warming.

COAST GUARD

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to present petitions endorsed by hundreds of people from my constituency, the majority from Salt Spring Island, and another petition, which is the same, from people from the lower mainland.

The petitioners request that Parliament make the Coast Guard an independent body, separate from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, with all the necessary resources for staffing and equipment, including a new hovercraft, to enable it to perform rescues of those in peril.

This is a very important issue. The petitioners are obviously very pleased with the member for Delta—South Richmond, and hopefully the government will take notice as well, of his long pursuit of this matter.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Raymond Bonin (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to present the following four petitions on behalf of my constituents.

All four petitions call upon Parliament to protect our children by taking all necessary steps to ensure that all materials which promote or glorify pedophilia or sado-masochistic activities involving children are outlawed.

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary Southwest, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, it is my honour and my responsibility to present the following petition which was signed by 26 electors from the city of Calgary.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to focus its legislative support on adult stem cell research to find the cures and therapies necessary to treat the illnesses and diseases of suffering Canadians.

Routine Proceedings

● (1550)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Madam Speaker, I would like to present a petition signed by several hundred people as part of a petition originally signed by over 20,000 people. Along with this petition, there is a petition on the web that has been signed by several thousand people, which we cannot present in the House but which plays an important role in asking Parliament to support the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans of extending Canada's jurisdiction or custodial management over the nose and tail of the Grand Banks and the Flemish Cap so we can protect the meagre resources we have left.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Jim Pankiw (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Ind.): Madam Speaker, I have petitions here from Eva Graf, Monique Bernard, Mr. Therres, Jackie Lockhard and Mr. and Mrs. Kullberg of Humboldt. They and other petitioners are requesting that Parliament take all necessary steps to protect our children from sexual predators by outlawing materials which promote or glorify pedophilia or sado-masochistic activity involving children.

COAST GUARD

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I have a petition related to the Coast Guard. The petitioners are drawing attention to the fact that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has not funded the Coast Guard adequately resulting in staffing problems and equipment shortages, as well as training deficits.

They draw attention to the recent tragic drowning related to the *Cap Rouge II*. They note that the Coast Guard is in desperate need of a new hovercraft. They also object to the fact that search and rescue does not seem to be a priority of the government.

The petitioners therefore are calling for the Coast Guard to be separated from DFO and established as an independent and well-funded organization to effectively patrol our coasts and provide search and rescue.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I have three separate petitions on three very different but important matters.

The first petition is from constituents concerned about the way the courts have applied existing child pornography laws. They call upon Parliament to protect our children by taking all steps necessary to ensure the materials that promote or glorify pedophilia or sado-masochistic activities involving children are outlawed.

AIRLINE SECURITY

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, the second petition is with regard to a longstanding fight by the official opposition against the government, which is the \$24 air security tax, and calls on the government to reconsider its unwise choice.

COAST GUARD

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, the third petition is one that has been raised by a number of my colleagues in the House from British Columbians regarding the federal government's very poor handling of the Coast Guard, particularly with regard to the response to the *Cap Rouge II* incident.

The petition calls on the federal government to separate the Coast Guard from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, particularly in response to the fact that the government has shut down the ports police and this is a vital thing, not only for the safety and security of British Columbians and Canadians but for our national security.

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from a large number of Canadians, including from my own riding of Mississauga South.

The petitioners believe that life begins at conception. As a consequence they oppose embryonic stem cell research. They would like to draw to the attention of the House that non-embryonic stem cells, also known as adult stem cells, have shown great potential.

Therefore they call upon Parliament to focus its legislative efforts on promoting adult stem cell research to find the therapies and cures required by Canadians.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions dealing with the issue of child pornography. The petitioners call upon Parliament to do what it can to limit and restrict child pornography.

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I have a third petition that deals with cautioning Parliament with regard to the use of stem cell research.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Question No. 3 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 3—**Mr. Gerald Keddy:**

What are the regulations concerning capital gains deferral for private woodlot owners?

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): The 2001 budget extended the existing tax-deferred rollover of farm property to a child to transfers of commercial woodlots after December 10, 2001, where the woodlot is operated in accordance with a "prescribed forest management plan".

Supply

The budget indicated that specific criteria for prescribed forest management plans would be developed in consultation with interested parties. The department's consultations with interested stakeholders have now been completed and draft regulations defining "prescribed forest management plans" will be developed taking into consideration the views expressed during our consultations.

As indicated in the 2001 budget, intergenerational transfers that occur before the regulations are promulgated will qualify for the tax-deferred rollover if a plan providing for the necessary attention to the woodlot's growth, health, quality and composition is followed.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if Question Nos. 1 and 5 could be made orders for return, the returns would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Bakopanos): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 1—**Mr. Guy St-Julien:**

With regard to the Social Services Minokin in Val-d'Or, can the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs or any other department indicate, for each year from 1997 to 2002 inclusively, the amount of the funds, grants and/or contributions awarded for the delivery of programs and services to the members of the Abitibiwinni (Pikogan), Lac Simon and Kitisakik communities, and specifically: (a) how much was the administrative budget in each year; (b) how much of those funds were earmarked for travel outside Quebec and Canada; and (c) what were the terms and conditions of these agreements, for each year?

Return tabled.

Question No. 5—**Mr. John Williams:**

With regard to the Court Challenges Program operated by the government: (a) which individuals, groups and/or organizations received funding under the program in fiscal years 1999-2000, 2000-2001 and 2001-2002; (b) how many individuals or Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) work in the Department of Canadian Heritage or any other department on the program; (c) how much is spent each year by the government on the administration of the program; (d) who (name, city or town of residence and company or organization each individual is affiliated with) currently determines who receives funding under the program; (e) which individuals or which company is currently conducting the review of the Court Challenges Program; (f) how much has been budgeted for the review; and (g) how much has been spent on the review?

Return tabled.

• (1555)

[English]

Mr. Geoff Regan: Madam Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Bakopanos): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I ask that all Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I wish to inform the House that, because of the ministerial statement, government orders will be extended by 25 minutes.

[English]

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

A few moments ago the government House leader accepted the request for unanimous consent from one of our members to withdraw a motion but in the meantime gave a lecture that this was not the way we do it, that the offices should be notified.

I have been notified that the government House leader's office was notified that this was going to be done, as were other members who have indicated that was the case.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I thank the hon. member for informing the House, but I think that is an issue that should have been taken up with the government House leader at that appropriate meeting.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—MARKETING OF PRAIRIE GRAINS

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, all Canadians are to be treated equally and fairly, and since Prairie wheat and barley producers are discriminated against solely because of their location and occupation, this House call on the government to take immediate action to end this discrimination and give Prairie farmers the same marketing choices that are available in the rest of Canada.

He said: Madam Speaker, we will be splitting our time.

In the course of the business of the House, hon. members are required to debate and take positions on a great variety of issues. While all of them are important in their own right, some of them carry much more significance reflecting the kind of nation that Canada is.

I use the term "reflecting Canada" rather than "defining Canada" because I believe that what defines a free society is not necessarily established by law. Those things are part of our nature, our history and our values. They cannot be legislated into being and they cannot be debated into existence. They first must exist in our hearts, then in society and then, finally, in the laws of our nation.

Supply

One of this country's most positive attributes is its sense of fairness; that we intrinsically believe that all people should be treated with respect, with justice and with dignity. I say as Canadians we believe that sometimes almost to a fault.

There is no part of this nation where Canadians believe that others are not entitled to the same rights, the same opportunities, the same dreams and the same freedoms. We insist on fairness for all.

However, while the House cannot create such attributes, it can destroy them. The laws that are passed in this place either protect our inherent rights and freedoms and those of others or they erode them. They either strengthen them or diminish them. While some legislation has little impact on these things, other policies go to the heart of what we believe, and still others violate these norms. One of the latter is the legislation which results in our courts sending farmers in one part of the country to jail for activities which are considered normal commercial practices in other parts of the country. I am referring to the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Quite frankly, I know of no other single policy in our nation today that does more violence to the fundamental rights and freedoms of Canadians than that one. It singles out a particular group of people, the grain farmers, in a particular region, the Prairies, and strips those involved of commercial opportunities that no other Canadian businessperson would dream of being deprived of.

Having done so, it then attempts to convince other Canadians that the stripping of such rights is perfectly acceptable and can be rightfully imposed on others any time one can demonstrate some claim to public opinion or academic expertise. In doing so, these claims and these policies erode the very foundation of democracy from which they purport to drive their authority.

I must admit that for many years I, like most Canadians, did not appreciate the impact this law was having on real people in some parts of our country. I was born and raised in Ontario. Although my grandparents were mixed farmers in Ontario and although my father did business in western Canada, I was unfamiliar with the Canadian Wheat Board, at least its origins, its purpose and the impact it has.

All that changed during my term as a Reform member of Parliament and, more specifically, my years as president of the National Citizens Coalition. During that time I travelled around the Prairies and met hundreds of smart, entrepreneurial, hardworking farm families who were struggling to save, to expand and to diversify their industry. In the face of often difficult markets, they were finding lucrative markets outside our borders, yet prevented by law from exploiting those opportunities by an archaic, collectivist federal monopoly. Some of them, out of desperation and determination, took their grain across the border. They simply wanted to be treated like every other Canadian citizen expects and deserves to be treated.

For those who are not familiar with the monopoly of the Wheat Board, allow me to explain what it means.

Everywhere in the country except the prairie region Canadian grain farmers are encouraged to sell what they grow. The prairie farmers who grow wheat and barley and want to export it or sell it for human consumption must let the Canadian Wheat Board sell it. Unless they go through a bureaucratic and expensive process to buy

back their own wheat, prairie farmers are not allowed to sell their own grain.

In spite of the fact that the Canadian Wheat Board Act is a federal law which technically applies to all of Canada, the prairie region is singled out for different treatment. While farmers in Quebec, Ontario, the Atlantic provinces and most of British Columbia can freely market their grain, prairie farmers cannot. The result of this are the following inequities.

If people farm in Ontario, they can sell their wheat through the Ontario Wheat Board or on the open market. However if people farm on the Prairies they can go to jail if they try to sell their wheat on the open market.

If people farm in Nova Scotia, they can sell their wheat directly to a mill. However if people farm on the Prairies they can go to jail if they try to sell their wheat to a mill.

• (1600)

If people farm in Quebec, they can obtain export licences at no cost, but if people farm on the Prairies, the cost of export licences takes the profit out of any sale beyond the Wheat Board.

If people farm anywhere else in the prairie region export licences are routinely granted, but if people farm on the Prairies export licences are routinely denied.

The arguments for retaining this monopoly are varied and complex, but at the end of the day they all have one thing in common. They are just an excuse for denying basic freedoms.

For example, the Liberal government claims that the CWB can obtain a better price for farmers' wheat because of its monopoly position. Yet the fact is the CWB has no monopoly in the context of the world market.

Canada grows only 5% of the world's wheat and holds only 18% of the world wheat export market. This means that for every CWB agent out there peddling a bushel of wheat the competitors are lined up with four times as much to sell. That is some monopoly.

On the basis of data the Wheat Board keeps secret, the Liberal government also claims that it has done studies which prove the CWB obtains better prices for farmers. However it never considered all the costs.

Costs it does not factor into the study are such things as the lost opportunity costs for farmers who want to add value; the costs of failing to develop niche markets; the costs of inefficiencies in a bureaucratic grain handling and transportation system; the costs of endless commissions, studies, panels and hearings on this issue; or, finally, the exorbitant costs paid by many farmers to fight for the basic economic right to sell their own property.

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If the Wheat Board were really to have this superior performance in wheat markets it would not be afraid to show all of that data to western farmers, which it has never done.

The next argument the government puts forward is the claim that if farmers had to compete against each other for markets it would drive the price of wheat down. This is simply silly. What other business people are being told by the federal government that the more buyers they have for their products the more the price drops?

Multiple buyers push the price up as grain buyers compete with one another to secure supply for their sales commitments. If farmers were to have a choice about who they sold their products to, they would always choose the one offering the higher price. Those would be our farmers, perhaps not the Liberals' farmers. This would force grain buyers to compete against each other or see the business go elsewhere.

Finally, we are told farmers want the monopoly. This is an interesting argument. What is the evidence of this? Was there a vote in 1943 when the monopoly was first established? No. Did farmers vote when the government decided to bring in this wartime monopoly to keep wheat prices low? No. Was there a vote in 1949 when it was again decided to keep the monopoly around even though the war was over? No.

Was there a vote when the government decided to give wheat to Great Britain at half its commercial value in the 1950s? No. Was there a vote when government never repaid farmers for these losses? No. Was there a vote in the mid-1950s when the government decided to renew the CWB monopoly again? No. Was there a vote five years later when it happened yet again? No.

Was there ever a vote? Yes, there was a vote. The current Wheat Board minister had a vote in 1997. He gave prairie farmers two options. Would farmers like to leave the monopoly exactly as it is or should he destroy the Canadian Wheat Board for everyone?

There was no option of a dual market. There was no mention of a voluntary system. There was no chance for individual choice. There was no opportunity to have a system like Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia or the west slopes of British Columbia. There was only the rigged plebiscite that frustrated farmers and solved nothing. It was followed by this farcical system of elections that the government likes to point to where it still has effective control of the Wheat Board. It controls one-third of the board which is directly controlled by the minister. These elections, frankly, would not pass a UN monitoring system.

Perhaps someone should tell the government that there are many farmers who are not interested in electing a director to a corporation they do not want to do business with. We believe that people should be treated equally and fairly. If farmers want to market through the Wheat Board, let them do so.

● (1605)

Voluntary cooperatives are a cherished part of this nation's history and frankly, with competition the Canadian Wheat Board would do a lot better job of serving the farmer. However for farmers who want to take their business somewhere else, they should have the freedom to do so. Such freedoms are the basic right of all Canadians and are the responsibility of the House to protect. Western Canada and prairie

farmers should have the same rights as any other Canadian when it comes to these freedoms.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in his speech the member referred to the Wheat Board cost per bushel which he characterized as being exorbitant. I am not sure if the member is aware, but the audited financial statement for the Canadian Wheat Board indicated that the cost was approximately 5¢ a bushel.

If the member characterized the Wheat Board cost as being exorbitant then he must know compared to what. Could he advise the House what those costs are compared to someone like Cargill's or ADM's?

Mr. Stephen Harper: Madam Speaker, I am not sure exactly what costs the member was referring to in that question. He misses the point that it is not my decision whether those are the appropriate costs farmers want to have any more than it is his decision. That is a decision to be made by people in the industry who understand the option and who have the options available to them. That is the point. It is not up to us here.

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Alliance leader's panacea for this seems to be to have a dual market. Justice Muldoon in Alberta, a number of years ago, threw out that notion saying that a dual market would simply be a transition to an open market. We have seen that this year with the Ontario Wheat Board. Why does the leader of the Alliance think that a dual market will work for more than about 30 days?

Mr. Stephen Harper: Madam Speaker, I am unclear why the hon. member of the NDP would think that marketing choice would not work here as it does in so many other industries in this country.

If the NDP got away from this single desk, socialistic philosophy and instead got back to its roots, listened to western farmers and listened to the options that western farmers want to deal with the difficult situation that their industry faces, it might find once again that it would have western farmers interested in voting for it.

The reason why this party has gradually lost favour in rural areas of western Canada is because it simply is not open to the views of farmers on these issues and keeps raising these completely unrealistic scenarios that somehow all options would collapse if farmers had a choice.

I think what would happen is that the Wheat Board would be forced to modernize itself and deal more openly, fairly and efficiently with its customers. We would see not only marketing choice, but a strengthened cooperative, which is in the interests of the industry.

•(1610)

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, oats were removed from the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly in the early 1990s. Since that time Canada has become the largest exporter of oats for human consumption in the world. I am proud to say that one of the plants is in Portage la Prairie in my home province.

Does the member agree that if we leave it up to marketers and individual farmers to market innovatively, that greater wealth for this country can be produced?

Mr. Stephen Harper: Madam Speaker, it has been clear in my travels in recent years that most of the growth in the western grain industry has been in grains not covered by the Wheat Board monopoly. It is not just oats, but the growth of the lentil industry and the organic industry, within the grain industry that have been seeking to stay outside the Wheat Board monopoly.

We believe there is a clear majority opinion for a dual market, but there is debate among farmers about whether certain grains should stay within the Wheat Board monopoly. One of the fascinating things is that once the grain is outside of it, nobody ever demands that it be put in the Wheat Board monopoly, because as the hon. member says, that is where all the growth is.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Madam Speaker, did the hon. member, in replying to the member from the New Democratic Party, indicate this is all about votes, not about the producers themselves or the free market system? Did I hear him say that the New Democratic Party would get more votes in western Canada if it would change its tune?

Mr. Stephen Harper: Madam Speaker, our party was founded on the notion that we would get more votes if we listened to people. That is a healthy thing. I would say to the hon. member for Brandon—Souris that I understand his party has essentially the same position as ours, that it favours dual marketing on Wheat Board issues. The member should work with us to change the law and change the government rather than aligning himself with the NDP.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I appreciated the speech made by the leader of our party. As an Ontarian and a person who has not been a farmer, he has come to understand the situation very well.

When many other people find out the facts about the Canadian Wheat Board they begin to change their minds as well. That includes Liberal backbenchers who have approached me over the last year to talk about the issue. They have said to me that this cannot be the way it really is. After the situation is explained to them, they cannot believe it. This goes beyond a partisan issue. I would suggest that is why a Liberal dominated agriculture committee approved the agriculture committee standing report last spring which called for a voluntary marketing option. It called for a short term free market option for farmers.

The committee travelled across Canada and listened to farmers, especially farmers in western Canada and their comments about the Wheat Board. I will give credit to the chairman of our committee because he was willing to listen. He said to us, “The farmers have told us that they would like to see this option and we are willing to support it”. There were other Liberal members travelling with the

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committee, such as the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, the member for Dufferin—Peel—Wellington—Grey and the member for Huron—Bruce. They all supported the recommendations made by the committee.

It looks to me like we are going to have some interference with that report. There are rumours that when it comes back to the agriculture committee, we will see some interference from the government. Given the history of the minister responsible for the Wheat Board and also the Solicitor General, we expect to see their fingers somewhere in that pie.

I have a greater concern that there will be some interference with the way things are run. This concern comes from an article in the *Western Producer*. Barry Wilson interviewed the minister responsible for the Wheat Board and he wrote:

Goodale said last week that farmers don't have to go to jail to protest the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly. They simply have to convince a majority of Canadian Wheat Board permit holders that they want marketing freedom and presto, the monopoly is gone.

One would think that would be the end of it, but I am afraid there are some qualifiers with regard to that. I would like to read them into the record. Later the minister was asked directly, if Wheat Board elections returned a majority of farmer directors calling for an end to the monopoly, would he change the legislation? His answer was, “If that is the democratic will of farmers, obviously the government would have to respond to it, yes”.

That response is not necessarily freedom for farmers because, and I quote from the article again:

Then came the qualifiers. A recommendation from the Canadian Wheat Board [not farmers] to end the monopoly would trigger a government organized vote among permit holders.

We have already seen one of those. I quote again:

A majority vote against the monopoly would be persuasive [the minister tells us] in the campaign to convince the government to amend the legislation.-

One would expect that a majority vote would make the decision, but no, it would be persuasive.

This is a tremendous concern for us. We are debating this issue today and already the minister is apparently telling us that it does not matter what farmers want, it does not matter what the vote decision would be, it would only be persuasive to the government. The article goes on to say:

“But a majority vote in favour of change would not necessarily be accepted by the government as the voice of farmers”, Goodale said. “There is a technical question about how big the vote would have to be”. He said the government would have to decide if the turnout and the margin of victory were large enough to be sure that an end to the CWB monopoly is really what farmers want”.

I have to ask, what do farmers have to do to get the government's attention and to get change? There is a long history here.

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I have farmed for 25 years and have watched as people around me have battled this issue for decades. Many of them have spent most of their lives trying to bring about changes to the Canadian Wheat Board. As I was growing up, farmers were told that they needed the Wheat Board, that they were not capable of doing their own business. I know for a fact that is not true.

In the early 1990s we went through a fall when there was a lot of frozen wheat throughout a good part of the Prairies. Farmers began to wonder what they could do with their wheat.

Farmers in my area actually went down to Great Falls, Montana and talked to one of the grain companies and made a deal as to what they could get for their wheat. The company was cooperative. Unfortunately, as part of the buyback program, farmers had to tell the Canadian Wheat Board whom they were selling their wheat to, which they did. They got a call from the grain company saying it did not need their wheat and would not deal with them. The company said it had as much wheat as it wanted. It named a price which was between 50¢ and 80¢ a bushel less than the farmers had negotiated.

That began to open up people's minds. New crops were introduced in our area. People saw they were capable of marketing their own product.

It is interesting to note that in the early runs when farmers decided to take their wheat across the border, the minister said there was nothing that the Wheat Board could do. As it began to pick up momentum, it changed its mind and began to charge the farmers under the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

• (1615)

Interestingly enough, on May 16, 1996, the first farmers, and David Sawatsky was one of them, were found innocent. Mr. Sawatsky should have been able to walk out of the court and continue on his way and to move his wheat where he wanted to move it. What did the government do?

That same day the minister changed the customs regulations to ensure that all other farmers who were charged would be convicted. He rewrote the legislation, the Wheat Board minister who presently sits here and is supposed to be representing western Canadian interests. He wonders why his party is out of touch with western Canada. He has made those comments himself. He is not part of the solution. He is actually part of the problem. Not only that, the government rewrote the legislation to lock in the repression. Our position has been consistently that people have the right to do their own business.

The example of Mr. Sawatsky was not the first nor was it the last example of repression by the government. Andy McMechan who is a farmer from Manitoba grew 20,000 bushels of a specialty waxy barley. The Wheat Board told him it had no market and it would only market it as a lower grade of barley and pay him about \$3 a bushel. The U.S. market told him he could get \$6 a bushel, so he started moving his wheat down to the United States.

The Canadian Wheat Board, customs, justice and the RCMP all got involved. The gentleman spent 155 days in jail because of what the government was trying to do to him, which was trying to break him. There were multiple strip searches. He was thrown into cells

with people who threatened him. How is a regular citizen supposed to survive that?

Last Thursday I was in Lethbridge. Premier Klein came to address the rally. Almost 1,000 supporters were there. I would say it was a historic day in the struggle for freedom.

I said that we had come to support a group of people who are holding to their convictions over comfort, to their commitment over convenience, and to their faith over fear. One of the things that really bothered me, and I think it was the most frustrating moment of the day, was watching the families say goodbye to their fathers.

The rally was on one side of the street in a parking lot. When the time came that the rally was over, people lined up on both sides of where the farmers were walking. They walked through the group of people. Their wives were with them. Their teenage daughters were crying and their little kids, who did not understand what was going on, were crying. There is a picture in most of the national papers of one little nine-year old girl who did not even understand except that her dad was being locked up for trying to sell his grain.

For most of the weekend I was really angry. I am usually a pretty controlled person but it just made my blood boil to see normal, hardworking people run that far afield of the government that they were being locked up. Several of them are still there today.

They are not standing alone because there is tremendous support for the farmers. Their families were there, their parents and their wives. Their neighbours were there. One of the farmers' wives approached me and said, "We thank you for what you are doing in trying to help our husbands out". Other farmers were there.

Consistently surveys have shown that there is strong support for marketing choice. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has done surveys which show there is 75% to 80% support for change. The Canadian Wheat Board surveys, which it will not release but which were leaked, show over 60% support for marketing choice. Our mail-outs show up to 80% support for marketing choice. The *Edmonton Journal* did a survey just the other day which showed over 90% for marketing choice.

The farmers just want choice. They want out of jail and they want to be able to market and do their own business.

For those who would like to support these farmers I would like to point out that a fund has been set up to support them. The mailing address is: Box 68, Cremona, Alberta, T0M 0R0.

I suggest that the real culprit is actually here. The minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board has served his party's interests consistently over the years against the interests of his constituents and against the interests of western Canadians.

In conclusion, we often hear there are only a few countries in the world that jail their farmers for selling their own wheat. That is not true. There actually is only one. That one is Canada. Even China now allows its farmers to sell their own wheat on the Chinese domestic market. So the freedoms we dream of and the freedoms that so many others in Canada have, farmers all around the world already have. We are here today to help work toward giving prairie farmers those same opportunities.

Therefore, today I would like to seek the unanimous consent of the House to make this opposition motion votable and that it not be considered as part of the total allotment of votable supply day motions.

• (1620)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The House has heard the terms of the proposal. Is there consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): There is no consent.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I report to the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, which is exactly what we are talking about.

Part of the job of the parliamentary secretary is to become familiar enough with the files on some of the important issues. I want to ensure that Canadians understand that in this regard we understand the legal process is often difficult and indeed the farmers whom we are talking about in these cases had a protest, a legitimate process, I believe it was back in 1996. They had some concerns and those concerns were expressed through demonstration, which is part of the Canadian way. It is part of democracy. The fact remains though, that the actions taken by some farmers led to charges under the laws of Canada and the process—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Order. It is very difficult for the Chair to hear over the screaming and yelling of hon. members. There is plenty of time in questions and comments to voice an opinion or to make a comment.

Mr. Paul Szabo: As I was saying, Madam Speaker, the process of our justice system did take place. There were a variety of appeals. In fact, the determination of the courts ultimately was that the farmers were found to be guilty and they were fined. As a further protest, the farmers decided that instead of paying the fines, they would go to jail. I understand their concerns. Half of them have since paid the fine and are now out of jail.

With that as a background to get the facts on the table, the important issue here is the best interests of our western grain farmers.

When the Canadian Wheat Board was established, a process was established to ensure the best interests of western grain farmers were being presented. There was a consensus among western prairie farmers with regard to the Canadian Wheat Board instructions.

Can the member give the House an indication of where western farmers stand with regard to their support level for the Canadian

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Wheat Board? Can he confirm to the House that in the event that changes are sought to the Canadian Wheat Board Act, a plebiscite of the farmers and a recommendation of the board of directors is the first way to start?

• (1625)

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, the real issue here is whether people have the right to do their own business or not.

In reference to the question that was asked, I would like to point out as I did before that a Canadian Federation of Independent Business survey showed an almost 80% support for change. The Canadian Wheat Board survey showed well over 60%. Our mail-outs show consistently higher than that, 60% to 80%. Other MPs tell me the same thing. The *Edmonton Journal* survey said that over 90% of people think that farmers should have the freedom to make their own marketing decisions.

The frustration comes from the attitude that the minister has portrayed over the years, which is that he is willing to interfere at every step to keep farmers from getting choice. We will see this in the next few days in terms of the recommendation at the agriculture committee. I ask people to keep an eye on that to see what happens.

The article that we have talked about today talks about the fact that first there needs to be a recommendation from the Canadian Wheat Board. That is not likely to come. The vote needs to be organized by the anti-choice government that is in place. The majority vote would only be persuasive. Then there is a big question about how big that vote should have to be.

It seems to me there is no interest in democracy here. The parliamentary secretary wonders why farmers resort to civil disobedience. Part of the reason is that the Liberal government is so completely out of touch with what is going on in western Canada that there is no chance of the Liberals understanding what is going on there and the feelings that farmers have.

Farmers are so frustrated that they feel they have no other opportunity than to do what was done last week in Lethbridge. Actually there are other farmers who are coming into the same situation. In Saskatchewan within the next couple of months some of the same choices will have to be made by farmers.

The government has continued to persecute and pressure farmers. We need relief from that by giving people marketing choices and the ability to make their own decisions.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am glad to have this opportunity to talk about the topic of grain marketing and the mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board in western Canada.

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First, I want to address how this debate is sometimes characterized by those who would oppose the Canadian Wheat Board and, especially today, the official opposition. As we have seen so far, it likes to depict the grain marketing controversy as a battle between farmers on one side and the government on the other. That is a convenient political portrayal for them, but it is in fact grossly inaccurate.

There is not a case of government versus farmers here. This is a case of different groups of farmers themselves having profoundly different opinions about the marketing system they want. All farmers are not on the same side of this debate. I wish they were, quite frankly, as that would make things quite simple. That would make life rather easy, but it is not reality. The fact is that decent, well-intentioned farmers are on opposite sides of this argument and they hold widely different opinions with very deep convictions on both sides. It is not all black and white. It is not all one-sided. That is what makes policy making on marketing issues so very difficult.

Second, the Canadian Wheat Board is not a marketing system that has been imposed recently upon the grain sector across western Canada. The Canadian Wheat Board came into effect in the 1930s, under a Conservative government at the time, and it got its primary mandate in the early 1940s. It has functioned on behalf of western farmers ever since that time.

So over many decades, the Canadian Wheat Board has been well established and, for the most part, well supported. Given that long history deeply rooted in the prairies, change after all of those years is not a particularly simple thing. It is one thing to decide whether or not to implement in the first place a single desk marketing system where none existed before. It is quite a different proposition to remove a single desk system after it has been up and running for over half a century. What seems to some to be a simple matter of personal freedom is to others the removal of their basic marketing rights and traditions. It cuts both ways.

In recognition of this reality and to make the Canadian Wheat Board more democratic, more flexible and responsive, more agile in the marketplace, and more accountable directly to farmers, the Canadian Wheat Board Act was amended in several major ways in 1998. Accordingly, compared to what the group known as Farmers for Justice was protesting against back in 1996, the Canadian Wheat Board now has changed fundamentally, with the biggest changes in the western grain marketing system in more than 50 years.

The CWB is no longer a federal crown corporation. It is no longer run by a set of government appointed commissioners. The Canadian Wheat Board is now governed by a modern, corporate style board of directors, with a full two-thirds controlling majority duly elected by prairie farmers themselves. The chairman of the board is one of those elected producers, indeed, one who got elected in the first place on a platform about dual marketing and rose through the ranks democratically to become the chair. All of the powers and authorities of the Canadian Wheat Board are now vested in the hands of its directors. Thus, farmers themselves now control the destiny of the CWB, not politicians or bureaucrats, but farmers.

The opposition says that the government interferes with that democracy by still appointing 5 of the 15 board directors who always, they say, vote the government's way, and by holding the

power to issue the board certain directives which it must follow. Let me comment on those allegations.

First, let us look at the calibre of the people we have in fact chosen since 1998 to serve in the capacity of these external directors. They are senior people from the world of international finance. They are experienced lawyers and grain marketers. They are distinguished corporate executives from the natural resources sector beyond agriculture, people like Mr. Jim Stanford, for example, the former chief executive officer of Petro-Canada, whose ability and reputation in western Canada and in all of Canada is absolutely beyond reproach.

I would also note that I have never once requested any appointed director, or any director for that matter, to vote in any particular way on any issue. It is entirely up to them to exercise their own skill and judgment.

• (1630)

Similarly, since I first became Wheat Board minister in 1993, I have never once issued any directive to the Canadian Wheat Board as a whole, not once. Incidentally, that same power has been there in the law since at least 1943. It was not invented in 1998.

The opposition criticisms ring false and hollow in the face of both facts and experience. This point about producer control goes directly to the heart of the issue before the House today in this opposition motion.

Is it true that only prairie producers need Canadian Wheat Board export permits to do their own export sales across the border? No, it is not true. Any export sale of Canadian wheat or barley from anywhere in Canada requires an export permit from the Canadian Wheat Board.

Is it true that prairie producers cannot have the marketing flexibilities that Ontario producers have given to themselves under the Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board? No, it is not true. Those Ontario flexibilities were achieved through the democratic decisions of the directors of the Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board. Since 1998, prairie producers have had that same democratic right and authority because of the changes made to the Canadian Wheat Board Act, which I mentioned earlier.

Am I alone in holding the point of view that I have just described? No, I am not. Not judging by the mail that I receive from farmers across western Canada and not judging by the predominant themes of journalists and editorial writers over the past few days while this topic has been a particularly controversial one in the public arena.

Let us take Kevin Hursh as one example. He writes regular columns in both the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix* and the *Regina Leader Post* as well as many Saskatchewan weekly newspapers all over the province. He is widely quoted and respected. Most important, he is himself a farmer. Last week he wrote a lengthy column about the various sides in the grain marketing debate and the pros and cons of each. He noted the protests by farmers that were going on at the time in Alberta. He also noted the changes in the law that had been made, the ability of farmers to elect directors and to control the Canadian Wheat Board, and the fact that another round of producer elections is underway right now as we speak.

Then he said this about any decision to change the mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board:

This isn't a decision for media pundits, politicians or the Regina Chamber of Commerce. The future of grain marketing and the CWB is in the hands of producers, just where it should be.

While the opposition could no doubt retaliate by citing quotations from the anti-Wheat Board *Sun* chain of newspapers or the *National Post* or perhaps others, I could fire back with strong commentaries, equally strong, that appear in other various prairie publications including *The Western Producer* and others. It is interesting that the hon. gentleman quoted *The Western Producer* earlier today at length and failed to quote the other article in *The Western Producer* that points out the strength of the Canadian Wheat Board and makes the argument for why the Canadian Wheat Board should be retained. It would be helpful if the whole record and not just part of it were put on the table.

All of this just makes the basic point that this is not a simple issue with public opinion or farmer opinions all on just one side of the argument. It is far more complex than that.

• (1635)

And producer opinion changes. I think of Lorne Hehn, for example, who first came out of the United Grain Growers organization to be appointed by the Mulroney government to be chief commissioner of the Canadian Wheat Board more than a decade ago. Mr. Hehn, when in the private sector, had been a pretty stern critic of some of the Canadian Wheat Board's practices. There was some speculation at the time that he was being appointed perhaps to diminish the ability of the single desk from within. In fact, he became one of the Canadian Wheat Board's strongest advocates and defenders based on what he saw and learned and experienced after his appointment.

Earlier I mentioned the Canadian Wheat Board chairperson, a gentleman by the name of Ken Ritter, a farmer from west-central Saskatchewan. He ran to be elected to the first board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board in the fall of 1998. His platform at that time was very clear. It strongly favoured the principle of dual marketing: get rid of the single desk. But again, based upon the facts and his experience after his election, he changed his mind. He now strongly defends the board and the single desk, and he is still a farmer and still acts as chair of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Perhaps most significantly, let me mention Mr. Rod Flaman, a farmer from Edenwold, Saskatchewan, who was himself a full-fledged and prominent member of none other than the organization known as the Farmers for Justice. He was an active participant in

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those very protests in 1996 that have been referred to in the House today. He too ran into legal problems and proceedings and penalties, just like those other protesters in Lethbridge last week. No one needs to give Rod Flaman any lessons about how tough the grain marketing debate can be: he has been there, done that, and got the T-shirt.

But rather than just posing for the television cameras, he has been very serious about wanting to achieve constructive change, lasting change, change in the interests of farmers, change that will endure into the future. So after he had been a protester, he ran to become elected as a Canadian Wheat Board director the last time the elections were held. Guess what? He won. Last week, Rod Flaman had this to say:

I used to think the same way as the farmers in Alberta. In fact, I took my own grain across the border seven times in 1996. I am here to tell you now that I have changed my mind...The CWB is not perfect, but I now believe that the single desk system is a significant asset for farmers at getting the highest return for their grain. I found myself convinced by the facts.

So said Rod Flaman.

The bottom line is simply this. The Canadian Wheat Board is now a democratic, producer-controlled organization. The government has a clear record of not interfering in Canadian Wheat Board affairs. Even though the law might give me the authority to do so, I have not done so. If farmers indeed want the kinds of things that are implied in today's motion, they can in fact achieve them, but that is for them to decide democratically for themselves.

The lobbying that needs to happen and the convincing that needs to take place should not be aimed at the government or even at the opposition or any of the other parties in this House. It is not primarily the government's business. It is not primarily the opposition's business. It is the farmers' business. Those who advocate an end to the single desk need to persuade their fellow farmers that it is the right thing to do, because that is where the power lies and that is where it should lie, with farmers, and not with politicians, government or opposition, and not with bureaucrats.

• (1640)

Mistakenly, today's opposition motion prescribes a top down, made in government solution. That is the very nature of the problem that the opposition would object to in the first place.

The irony is that the motion is proposing that we do an end run around democracy. Never mind that some 65,000 or 70,000 farmers are voting right now. The opposition suggests that we do not pay any attention to that, that we do an end run around the democratic process.

The motion would also pre-empt the rights and powers of farmers that are vested in their hands. It would substitute a political policy manual for the decision making authority of farmers prairie-wide.

Supply

If and when the mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board were to be changed, it would come about not because of the partisan conduct of politicians, nor would it flow from the abusive trade behaviour and harassment of either the Americans or the Europeans. It would result from the democratic conduct of farmers making their own decisions for themselves, and that is as it should be.

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, in summing up the minister's speech, I would say that the Canadian Wheat Board's board of directors is there to administer the monopoly that is imposed by law, under the Canadian Wheat Board, by the House, namely the Liberal government. All that the board of directors is allowed to do under law is administer the act that it is given.

Can the minister tell me of any other economic enterprise in this country where the government and one group of that economic enterprise can tell another portion of producers in that economic enterprise how to do their business? Is this a free enterprise economy? Or is it a command economy by a monopoly imposed by a Liberal government?

• (1645)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Madam Speaker, I would remind the hon. gentleman that the board was established by a Conservative government, not by a Liberal government.

He said the directors have nothing to do but administer the act. In fact the act says, among other things, that the directors must demonstrate their accountability to producers, directly to the producers who elect them. That means taking into account what those producers say and acting on the views of their producer constituencies.

The act also contemplates changes in the board's mandate and lays out a procedure for how those changes can be accomplished. The advice and consultation of the board of directors would obviously be invaluable, indeed legally indispensable, in that process. It is not just administering the status quo. The board is in a position to facilitate change and to build toward change if that is its reading of what producers would want.

In terms of other examples of marketing boards and agencies, they exist in various parts of the natural resources, agricultural and fisheries sectors. There are a whole range of different marketing arrangements that farmers have put in place for themselves.

I would like to deal with the essence of the hon. gentleman's question. He said it is one particular point of view that is imposed upon all. He has touched on the very heart of what makes this issue so difficult. One farmer's point of view that the opposition is advocating is simply a matter of providing freedom. From another farmer's point of view, just as valid, just as honest, and just as legitimate as the first, it is the removal of an ability to market in the way that other farmer would want. That is the conundrum we have.

I do not think any of us in the House should have a vested interest or bias one way or another. What we need to do is be responsive and as fair as possible to all farmers, and there are some on both sides of this tough debate. By moving in one direction, we advantage some and disadvantage others; in moving in the opposite direction, we advantage some and disadvantage others. It is not a simple matter of

everything is black and white, and everything is simple. It is a more complex question than that.

What we have put in the law is a process by which that law can be changed and, ultimately, farmers would vote among themselves. I would submit that the 100,000 or so farmers across western Canada are more legitimate in making that decision than the 300 of us who sit in this privileged place. Farmers should hold the whip hand.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I get tired hearing the government constantly talk about how clean it is, that it is hands-off these institutions, and that it does not have any say. That is utter nonsense.

In the early 1990s, and the minister is familiar with it, the Conservative government lifted the barley sales. There was an open continental barley market. It was one of the most successful periods of time in barley growing history, not just for the farmers and producers in Alberta but for the Wheat Board which was at the same time entering into a competitive state with the barley growers. It was really pleased with what was happening, the increase in sales by both bodies of people and the increase of income. The decent living was looking good.

That is what the farmers wanted and had asked for. The Conservatives opened that door, then in 1993 the Liberal government was elected and it slammed the door. The people over there slammed the door on the open barley market and they have the gall to stand here and say that they do not interfere with the decisions. Hogwash. Tell me about the barley market.

• (1650)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Madam Speaker, I know the hon. gentleman from previous experiences in private life and I think his memory may be slipping. The legal proceeding that dealt with the barley market in 1993 was launched by a grain company, not by the Government of Canada. It was launched by a grain company and decided in the courts.

I hate to put some troublesome facts on the table that destroy the myths and rumours, but the fact of the matter is that the legal proceeding that was taken at that time was taken by a western Canadian grain company. That is where the issue got all ensnared.

In the case of barley, there are indeed some issues that the Canadian Wheat Board board of directors need to be particularly attentive to and pro-active about. I do not think it is his or my role to decide for the directors. We can legitimately raise issues and put questions before the directors and draw situations to their attention that they need to fix. There are certain issues in relation to barley, both on the feed side and the malt side, to which the directors for the future, and in the interest of grain farmers, need to pay particular attention.

Mr. Myron Thompson: You slammed the door shut.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: No, I did not.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Madam Speaker, I am sure the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board would like to hear this question. I have a couple of questions and not so much about barley. Oats was a commodity that was part of the Canadian Wheat Board and it was taken away from the Canadian Wheat Board. It was put into a dual marketing system. The minister has said that change is not simple, that it is very difficult to give up a single marketing system for a dual marketing system.

Could he tell me why oats was taken away and put into an open market system? Not only was production increased by farm producers but it was easy to remove from the single-desk marketing system and put into the dual marketing system.

I also looked at the financials. The credit risk in the Canadian Wheat Board for the Canadian government is \$7 billion. Is this the reason why the government is so reluctant to let go of the Canadian Wheat Board?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Madam Speaker, on those two points, it is probably just a little bit of inaccuracy in language. The decision on oats was not a dual market, but an open market. That is an important distinction. It does make the point that just maybe this notion of dual market is not one that is viable. The oats case demonstrated that with a relatively small market it can work in those cases.

Members will note that the volume of oats is substantially different from the volume of either wheat or barley and farmers might have a different opinion with respect to wheat or barley. In the case of oats we should not leave the impression that it was a dual system with both functioning successfully side by side. It was a case of a complete transition to the open market in the case of that relatively small volume commodity.

In the case of the contingency that is in the books, the hon. gentleman will know and this may be the point he is getting to, the reporting of every credit transaction of the Canadian Wheat Board is recorded as a separate transaction. Often the reporting at the end of the day cumulates the total where the real number is somewhat less.

If he has got—

• (1655)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Order, please. The Chair does try to accommodate everybody. I need unanimous consent if we are going to ask any more questions. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That when the House is in Committee of the Whole later this day in order to deal with Government Business No. 6, no quorum calls, requests for unanimous consent nor dilatory motions shall be entertained by the Speaker as of 9:00 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Supply

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[Translation]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—PRAIRIE GRAIN MARKETING

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to participate today, on behalf of the members of the Bloc Québécois, in this debate on the motion put forward by the hon. member for Calgary Southwest regarding the Canadian Wheat Board. I am pleased to participate in it and say that the members of the Bloc Québécois will oppose the motion for the following reasons.

Let us start by making clear what the Canadian Wheat Board is about. Many people in the francophone community, particularly in Quebec, are less familiar with the Canadian Wheat Board. I would like to explain briefly what it does and say a few words about the three pillars on which it rests. Finally, I will state the Bloc Québécois's specific position.

The Canadian Wheat Board is an organization run by grain producers which markets the wheat and barley produced in western Canada. The CWB, whose head office is in Winnipeg, is the largest wheat and barley dealer in the world, controlling more than 20% of the trade on the international market.

The Canadian Wheat Board is a leading Canadian exporter; each year, it sells more than 20 million tonnes of grain to more than 70 countries around the world, representing sales between \$4 billion and \$6 billion. The total proceeds, minus marketing costs, are distributed among the grain producers in western Canada.

This Board is governed by a 15-member executive, 10 directly elected by western producers, and the other 5 appointed by the federal government.

The board was established in 1935 as a voluntary marketing agency to provide producers with a government-guaranteed initial price and to stabilize the grain futures market. By the 1940s, the increasing demand for grain created by the war and the failure of the futures market led the government to grant monopoly powers to the Canadian Wheat Board.

The Canadian Wheat Board is based on three pillars. The first is single desk selling. Instead of competing against one another for sales, western Canada's 85,000 wheat and barley farmers sell as one through the CWB and can therefore command a higher return for their grain.

The second is price pooling. Price pooling means that all CWB sales during an entire crop year are deposited into one of four pool accounts; one for wheat, one for durum wheat, one for feed barley, and another for designated barley. This ensures that all farmers delivering the same grade of wheat or barley receive the same return at the end of the crop year regardless of when their grain is sold between August 1 and July 31.

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The third is a government guarantee. Prairie grain producers get an initial payment upon delivery of their grain and the Government of Canada guarantees this payment. The initial payment is equal to about 75% of the CWB's best estimate of the average market price for wheat and barley to be sold over the course of the crop year. As well, the federal government guarantees the CWB's borrowings that are currently about \$6 billion. That is how the Canadian Wheat Board operates.

Now I will outline the position of the Bloc Québécois. First, we are against this motion, because it would lead to the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board. Second, we oppose the motion because it condones illegal acts by certain farmers. And, third, collective marketing must be strengthened rather than dismantled. Indeed, our agricultural sector, both in Canada and in Quebec, is based on supply management or marketing agencies, which are absolutely critical to the sector.

The Canadian Alliance motion comparing western production to that of the rest of Canada is a lame one. Quebec's production and western Canadian production are completely different. Western Canada produces for export, whereas in Quebec, farmers produce for local consumption and for exchange with other farmers.

Agriculture in Quebec has developed thanks to collective management, supply management, joint planning and cooperatives. We believe that these types of mechanisms are necessary to protect farm revenues.

• (1700)

Given that the Canadian Wheat Board is being attacked on all fronts by the United States, it would be unwise to change its role. On October 24, 2002, the U.S. commerce department announced that it would be investigating the Canadian Wheat Board's wheat trading policies and practices. The department could decide to charge duties as of December 27, the date announced for its preliminary decision regarding countervailing duties. The department's final decision will be handed down by March 12, and its antidumping ruling will be made by May 27.

American producers claim that the activities of the Canadian Wheat Board contravene trade agreements. Since 1990, the United States has investigated the Canadian Wheat Board's operations nine times. These investigations all confirmed that the commission respected international trade rules.

We believe that any changes to the role of the Canadian Wheat Board at this time could be perceived as a surrender of sorts. It is important that the federal government stand firm and defend the supply management and collective management mechanisms set up by producers.

Marketing boards, such as the Canadian Wheat Board, reflect domestic policy. These policies will be developed in Canada and Quebec by our farmers.

In short, we believe that the Canadian Wheat Board and collective marketing must be enhanced rather than dismantled. We would however agree to adjustments being made to the CWB. Let me give three examples in this respect. Pilot projects focussing on the development of local processing activities could be approved. Accommodations could be made for organic wheat producers.

Efforts could be made to ensure that small and medium sized businesses are better represented in the various organs of the CWB.

These are the kinds of changes that may prove beneficial, and be acceptable. But as far as the current proposal by the Canadian Alliance is concerned, we can only oppose it fiercely. The Union des producteurs agricoles in Quebec also opposes it because, like us, its members want to defend supply management vigorously. They believe that structured marketing is an important vested right in our farming system. They also believe that any change to the Canadian Wheat Board would be perceived as weakening our position vis-à-vis the Americans.

Much as the CWB does, the UPA would like to organize the Quebec industry in such a way as to give producers greater influence over prices by putting in place a collective marketing mechanism. The UPA does not condone the extreme actions to which western farmers have resorted and also rejects this proposal.

The position of the Bloc Québécois is clear. We oppose this motion because we want to protect marketing boards and their supply management programs.

• (1705)

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I am a little disappointed in the position that the Bloc has taken on this. It runs contrary to the position it took last spring.

The member for Lotbinière—L'Érable travelled with us and he was one of the most enthusiastic members in terms of supporting the choice of western Canadian farmers. It was interesting to talk to him because he felt there were many similarities between the situation in which western Canadian farmers found themselves and the situation in which producers in Quebec found themselves.

I am a little disappointed today that the Bloc has taken a position that has gone against the position that the member took in the agriculture committee.

I do not know if the member is aware that the government is now extending the powers of the Canadian Wheat Board into Quebec. It is beginning to force producers in Quebec to get export licences that up till now they have not had. I know that is starting to cause interference with producers being able to move their product into the United States and sell into the markets that they normally have had.

I should also point out that it is important to know that there is a big difference between supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board. The supply management industry for the most part has nothing in common with the Wheat Board. It is a domestic industry. It is one where the products for the most part need to be used quickly. There is voluntary participation. There is strong support for supply management. There is no one calling for tearing that system apart. It is also free from government interference.

One thing the supply management industry brags about when it talks to us is the fact that the government is not subsidizing it, in contrast to the Wheat Board which is that most of the market is an export market. The product can be stored for a long time. There is little support on the Prairies for it, and the government controls the marketing agency much more than it ever has.

Is the member willing to reconsider the position that he has taken and support western Canadian farmers who have so much in common with Quebec producers? I would like his opinion on that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Madam Speaker, when we discussed this problem within the Bloc Québécois caucus, there was a unanimous position, the one I have just defended.

It is very clear that the positions we have taken were not reached without consultation with Quebec grain growers. We consulted the executive of the UPA by telephone and in person. The purpose of our position is to support the position taken by our producers.

I am speaking on behalf of the Bloc Québécois members of this House, since we have reached a consensus with Quebec grain growers to defend supply management and marketing bodies. I repeat, they continue to be concerned that doing anything to the Canadian Wheat Board at a time when the Americans are challenging it might be seen as an abdication, a backward step. It might be interpreted by the international tribunals as an acknowledgment by the growers themselves, or by the government, that this board is a kind of subsidy in disguise, whereas in the nine inquiries carried out by the Americans it was very clear that all complaints were thrown out because this marketing board works very well within international standards.

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, I do not know if the member is aware but in Alberta one member, Mark Hlady, has introduced Bill 207 that when passed will give Alberta grain producers the option of selling their wheat independently or of using the Wheat Board as a broker for a 10-year trial period. It is scheduled to be passed by December 10. If the federal government attempts to override the bill, the province is prepared to launch a constitutional challenge to the Supreme Court of Canada by introducing Bill 201 which would then amend Bill 202.

His party has strong feelings about provincial rights. Does the member feel that the Canadian Wheat Board extending its reach into Quebec, which it is now beginning to do and actively looking to do I believe, is going to impinge on Quebec provincial rights and its ability to make decisions within its province?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Madam Speaker, I believe that Quebec producers have always managed to get their point of view across. They have always had a collective vision when it comes to the development of agriculture in Quebec. True, there is a movement in the prairies, mostly in Alberta, to reject such collective management in favour of a more individual approach.

However, I believe that what led to the creation of the Canadian Wheat Board was precisely this free for all, this fact that agricultural development was taking place without any structured government

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support, and without any temporary buying and selling power, to resell when the economic situation improved. It is important to remember that this also guaranteed farmers payment at seeding time. I do not understand why we would question these principles that were developed over the past 30 years and return to an individual enterprise. This is a copy of the American system, which is exactly what the Americans want, for us to bend to their ways so that they can flood our country—or rather, our two countries—with their production.

We will never manage to compete with American producers unless we stand together, with an effective marketing system and supply managed planning. It is impossible to compete in North America without this. These marketing agencies must meet international standards. For this reason, we cannot change them overnight, without it having repercussions internationally.

• (1710)

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, the member speaks as though the marketing agencies and government run marketing agencies like the Wheat Board are benevolent for the people.

The minister earlier talked about the fact that we should be leaving it up to producers. I just want to make the point that I have been a producer. For 25 years. I have been a grain farmer. I have watched my small community suffer because people have not had the opportunity to value add and develop the industries in their area.

Interestingly enough, in the last 10 years we have moved into other crops like peas, lentils and chickpeas throughout Saskatchewan. I have done a bit of work and it is fascinating to find out that out of 700 small rural communities in Saskatchewan, 128 of them have specialty crop processing plants and facilities. They employ on average about eight people, so we have about 1,200 people working. That contributes well over \$100 million to the Saskatchewan economy. That contrasts with the flour milling industry which is currently less in Canada than it was in 1987. The majority of the plants are large and they are owned by American companies.

I have a great concern that western Canadians are being prevented from processing and value adding in their communities. They are prevented from allowing their communities to survive and thrive.

If he is going to insist that central marketing boards exist and they control everyone's lives, what solutions would he have for the small communities in western Canada that have struggled so hard because they are not allowed to process or to value add to the product of which they grow the most, which is wheat?

Supply

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Madam Speaker, in agriculture, it is not true that private enterprise, the kind of capitalism the member is talking about, will help small businesses, small producers. On the contrary, the big ones will benefit the most and crush the competition.

This is why it is much better to have a marketing board, and the current system that protects supply management plans and protects marketing boards, to give a chance to all the small producers as well as to the big ones.

The return to individual production or, as the hon. member suggested, to producer value for the sake of value adding will not be better served by individual management than by marketing boards promoting collective management.

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, I would point out that right now the Canadian Wheat Board marketing system forces farmers to the wrong side of the equation.

The member talked about supply management. Under the supply management system farmers have the opportunity to sell their product as well as process it. Under the Canadian Wheat Board system farmers are forced to sell their product to the board. There is no opportunity to do anything further with it. If farmers want to do anything further with it, they have to buy the product back at a rate that makes it completely uneconomical for them to do anything with it. That is the frustration that they face.

The member talked about co-operative enterprises. Groups of people have tried to form new generation co-operatives or companies that could market their grain, make pasta, put pasta plants in place and develop our industries in western Canada, but the government stopped that.

The government's buyback program only applies to farmers in western Canada, in the prairie provinces. People have to sell their wheat to the board and then buy it back at a higher price before they can do anything with it. When we travelled in Ontario people said that they did not have that buyback. They were excited about the opportunities and the chances they had to develop their industry.

Would the member have any comments about the inequity and inequality that is shown when the government forces prairie farmers to buy back their grain at a higher price than they sold it, while farmers in other parts of the country, including his own province, are allowed to be free of that?

If the government will not make a voluntary marketing agency, we insist that farmers have the opportunity to have a no cost buyback; be able to get their wheat back and be able to do something with their friends and neighbours, like forming companies that could help small communities thrive.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Madam Speaker, no system is perfect. As I said earlier, the marketing system can be improved, but it cannot be dismantled. The hon. member talks about the pros and cons but, sometimes, the dairy or poultry producers who are subject to supply

management would like to produce more. Their quota system does not allow it. This can be a disadvantage.

However, if we weigh the pros and cons, there are great benefits to preserving the current system, exercising self-discipline and managing our production using a management plan or a marketing board. Leaving management up to everyone individually, allowing a veritable free-for-all to ensue, will never result in a system as equitable as the one we have now.

That is why I say that the Canadian Wheat Board could possibly be improved, but not by deciding today to all but dismantle it. We must take into account the benefits of this board while trying to make it better, but definitely not by making it sound like it does no good.

When western producers are compared to eastern producers, I remind hon. members that western producers also received substantial assistance in the past 15 to 20 years. They have received tens of billions of dollars in special assistance, and this is great because they were struggling.

The system also works for milk producers who share some \$300 million every five years to support their management plan. Western producers however, organized into a well structured board, also received substantial assistance from the government in terms of special subsidies.

[*English*]

Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to begin by reading the motion that we are talking about today.

That, in the opinion of this House, all Canadians are to be treated equally and fairly, and since Prairie wheat and barley producers are discriminated against solely because of their location and occupation, this House call on the government to take immediate action to end this discrimination and give Prairie farmers the same marketing choices that are available in the rest of Canada.

I read the motion into the record because the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, in a comment to the Bloc Québécois member who just finished his remarks, indicated a few moments ago that the Canadian Wheat Board was moving into Quebec. I am wondering how it is that a motion that is directed because it solely discriminates against people in western Canada, all of a sudden this board now has duties and responsibilities which are clearly outside western Canada in the province of Quebec.

Fortunately, Madam Speaker, you do not have to rule on that because this is a non-votable motion that, from our perspective, wants to force the board to move to a dual marketing system rather than a single desk selling system that has worked in this country since the 1930s.

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I agree with others who have spoken before that the motion is out of place. We should not be debating it because the Canadian Wheat Board has become a farmer-run organization with two-thirds of the board now elected directly by farmers. Surely it is up to the farmers themselves and the farmer directors that they elect to decide what the board should do and what it should become, and not the purview of politicians.

The motion today, put forward by members of the Canadian Alliance, is really part of a well orchestrated, and I would add well oiled, campaign to influence elections for Wheat Board directors, elections that are occurring later this month.

On the basis of the vote in 1997 and on direct elections of Wheat Board directors in recent years, a majority of prairie farmers have demonstrated at the ballot box that they do support the Wheat Board as the single desk seller for wheat and barley, despite the fact that a few draw headlines by being flagrantly opposed.

These headline hunting farmers, who were referenced earlier this afternoon, deliberately chose to break the law and, rather than pay a fine, they deliberately chose to go to jail. That is their right. That is their vehicle of choice for grabbing publicity. I do not object to that but let us not, for heaven's sake, fall into the trap of making freedom fighters out of lawbreakers who knowingly and with forethought did what they chose to do.

As I indicated, I believe that a majority of prairie farmers do support the Canadian Wheat Board. I reference the 1997 referendum where 63% of feed barley growers voted to retain the board as a single desk seller for their product despite an aggressive campaign by opponents of the board at the time.

In 1998, and I was here, we debated Bill C-4 which resulted in elections to the board of directors, and in the ensuing elections that occurred following the passage of Bill C-4, 8 out of the 10 members elected by farmers were supporters of the Wheat Board's single desk selling of wheat and barley. These Wheat Board directors were elected despite an aggressive campaign by third party intervenors to shovel money from agri-business corporations to anti-Wheat Board candidates.

As I indicated, we are in an election period this fall for five more directors, or regions up for election or re-election, and again, third parties are busy at work funnelling money from corporations to anti-Wheat Board candidates.

We know that it is the American dominated, multinational agri-businesses that would benefit from the demise of the board. The American government has launched trade actions against the Wheat Board on eight previous occasions and all of them have failed. It is now in its ninth attempt to destroy the board. I believe that the eight previous attempts have failed because the Wheat Board has not been proven to be doing anything illegal according to international trading rules.

• (1720)

The board's sin, I think, and the one that raises the ire of the Americans, is that it is doing a reasonably good job of marketing Canadian grain, something the American government and American based multinationals have trouble accepting.

The motion today has been carefully timed to coincide with elections of Wheat Board directors which are occurring this month. The motion is part of a broader strategy by the board's enemies, of whom there are many, to attack the board and discredit its reputation among farmers.

We have to legitimately ask why the Canadian Alliance is working as a fifth column in Canada to assist the Americans in destroying something that has worked well for Canadian farmers for many decades and, I submit, continues to work well.

The latest tool in the arsenal of the opponents of the board and the Alliance in particular is to hammer the fact that the Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board has recently changed direction. In 1999 the Ontario board moved to a dual market where farmers could sell a portion of their crop on the open market. Of course, that was not sustainable. It was widely predicted at the time that it would not be sustainable, and that was proven to be accurate. This year the Ontario board has decided to basically legislate itself out of existence.

The lesson here is that we either have single desk selling, as we have at the moment through the Canadian Wheat Board, or we have an open market. A dual market simply does not work.

The point was made clearly by Justice Muldoon in Alberta some years ago in a charter challenge to the Wheat Board's single desk selling authority. Judge Muldoon at the time threw the case out of court, saying that a dual marketing system would simply be a rapid transition to an open market.

I do not believe western farmers want to do away with the Canadian Wheat Board but that is exactly what would follow if the Ontario model were to be adhered to. Let the Ontario wheat board put itself out of existence if it chooses to do so, but that is not necessarily a model for western farmers who sell primarily into an export market, which the Ontario producers do not.

In terms of good marketing, several independent economic studies have proven that the Wheat Board does do a good job of marketing on behalf of western farmers.

In the most recent study, Dr. Richard Grey, an agricultural economist at the University of Saskatchewan, found that in 2001 farmers received approximately \$10 more per tonne under single desk selling than would have been the case otherwise.

Similarly, in 1997 a Kraft-Furtan-Tyrchniewicz study showed a benefit of slightly over \$250,000 a year as a result of single desk selling. An even earlier study by agricultural economist Dr. Andy Schmitz showed that marketing through the Wheat Board increased the returns of barley producers by \$72 million a year.

Opponents of the Wheat Board do not accept the findings of these reports but they have never bothered or been able to refute them in any factual way.

Supply

At the time we were debating Bill C-4 there were wild allegations about the Wheat Board's governance being secretive and possibly corrupt. Since then Canada's Auditor General has conducted a thorough study of the board and reported in February 2002. She basically gave the Wheat Board a passing grade and said that it was doing a reasonably good job of managing its operation and, further, that the board has a solid reputation as a strong and capable marketer of quality grains.

It was not a perfect report. The Auditor General, in fairness it should be pointed out, indicated that there were areas where the Wheat Board could improve itself, but by and large it certainly did not agree with the allegations that had been alleged prior to the study by the Auditor General.

I said earlier that today's motion is carefully orchestrated as part of a larger strategy to attack and undermine the board. There are elections occurring at this moment for five of the Wheat Board's directors. In the 2000 election for five other directors, a group called CARE funnelled money and other advantages to anti-Wheat Board candidates.

• (1725)

CARE was clearly a third party intervener and as a third party intervener should have identified itself in any advertising it undertook and reported its activities following the election. In the 2000 election campaign the CARE group chose to thumb its nose at these election regulations, even though it had been independently documented that it took money from at least one grain company, UGG, and passed it on to anti-Wheat Board candidates.

This same third party group is at it again in these elections, again refusing to come clean about the sources of its support and is refusing to register as a third party.

I would ask this of colleagues in the Canadian Alliance who are so worried about alleged secrecy in the operation of the Wheat Board. Do they not care about the secrecy being practised by their friends in that group? Do the members of the Alliance, who are normally so interested in law and order, condone this flagrant disregard of the law by the CARE group?

I would also direct this question to the Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board. Why does he continue to allow the law to be ignored in this manner?

As far as we are concerned, the motion is an attack on the board and part of a broader strategy by enemies of the board, many of them big players in the multinational agri-business, to destroy the Wheat Board. Unfortunately, I think the Alliance is a willing collaborator in this campaign and is prepared to condone and even encourage people who oppose the Wheat Board to break the laws of the land. The Alliance is attempting to use the experience of the Ontario Wheat Board and apply it to that of the Canadian Wheat Board, even though such an application does not hold up.

If adhered to, the motion would destroy the board, one of the few remaining methods that farmers have to retain some power in the agricultural marketplace, a marketplace that is being increasingly diminished as a result of multinational corporations that seemingly run everything.

The motion I believe is out of place. It ought to be up to the farmers to elect the board of directors and see in which direction they want to take the board. That would be the proper outcome. This is not a decision that should or will be made by politicians. It should and can be made by farmers.

Just before I take my chair, I was admonished by the leader of the Alliance when I asked him a question about the need to listen to what was being said by people who were actually farming under the Wheat Board. I want to make reference to a letter that was sent to members of the standing committee on agriculture from Mr. George Calvin, who resides in New Norway, Alberta, on August 29 of this year. I will not read the whole letter, but there are several salient points.

Mr. Calvin writes:

I am a central Alberta farmer who has been well served over the years by the C.W.B. single desk selling. I am opposed to ending the C.W.B. sales monopoly for a trial period. The main thrust for this no doubt comes from the Canadian Alliance members on your committee. It is common knowledge that the C.A. Party wishes to destroy the C.W.B.

Of course their intentions are also being promoted by the Western Canadian Wheat Growers and Barley Growers Associations, and the Alberta Barley Commission. The Government of Alberta has financed these groups over time to push for the—

• (1730)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am not sure that it is parliamentary for the member to mislead the House. We are not trying to destroy the Wheat Board. We are in favour of a voluntary wheat board. I would ask him to retract his statement about that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): That is more a point of debate. Using the word "mislead" can be misleading for the Chair also.

Mr. Dick Proctor: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Calvin goes on. In reference to the current leader of the Alliance Party, he says:

It should be noted that when [this gentleman] was president of the National Citizens Coalition they tried to break the C.W.B. election process by breaking the rules that were put in place to run a fair and democratic election.

Even the agriculture critic for the Canadian Alliance does not escape in this letter, because it states:

It should also be noted that the C.A. is not a democratic party. Agricultural critic... said that even if all 10 elected directors want the C.W.B. to remain the single desk seller of wheat and barley, the Alliance would move to change the Board into a so-called voluntary marketing agency.

Mr. Calvin ends up by saying:

Because of the foreign control of our grain companies, a strong C.W.B. is more important than ever. Individual farmers would have very little power against the grain giants, therefore, I strongly suggest that the committee rescind this recommendation about C.W.B. marketing powers.

I want to also make reference to a letter that came in on the same subject from Elmer Laird, who farms in central Saskatchewan, because it is relevant to the dual marketing notion that has been put forward by the Canadian Alliance. This is something that I am not aware of, and maybe others are not as well, but is important to note that according to Mr. Laird:

It is true that when the Canadian Wheat Board was established it was in the form of dual marketing but the government of the day established a floor price for wheat of 52 1/2 cents a bushel at Davidson.

Mr. Laird goes on to say:

It couldn't have functioned without the floor price. However, a compulsory wheat board was established in either 1942 or 1943 which gave the Canadian Wheat Board total control of "board grains" in the market place. The board was then able to estimate the volume of product it would have for sale and develop long term contracts in some instances nation to nation.

In terms of the dual marketing, we have been there, we have done that. Apparently it did not work. It certainly will not work in the future. It will either be single desk selling or it will be open market; there is no in between.

• (1735)

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board would be operating in an open market system because it would be a voluntary cooperative, accessing grain through contracts and selling at the same as anybody else in a free enterprise system.

The Canadian Alliance policy since 1989 very clearly has been to have a voluntary marketing system in all agriculture commodities, including wheat and barley. Farmers never did vote to have a monopoly. That was imposed upon them by politicians.

The member from the NDP talks about philosophies and policies. The NDP is strong on human rights. Why is a farmer denied the human right to sell the fruits of his own labour after doing all the investment? Do the human rights of an individual farmer to do the best for himself not override a group of farmers who want to impose something on him that is negative to his economic well-being?

Mr. Dick Proctor: Mr. Speaker, I thought that the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board put that question into proper context by saying that there is a genuine debate among farmers, some of them on one side of this issue on single desk and others for an open market or a dual market. The position of this party is that it should be up to the farmers to decide.

As I indicated, the board is having elections this month and five of the positions are up for election. If farmers so choose to elect people who believe in dual marketing or open marketing, then that is what they will receive.

It is not up to the members of the House of Commons or any political party therein to decide the future of this. This is a complex issue. Farmers know best in this situation and we should leave it up to them, rather than dictate to them what their future will be.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I know that hon. member sat on the committee that travelled through Alberta when this issue was brought up. I believe he was there in Vulcan, Alberta. I attended that meeting, as well as some of my colleagues.

At that meeting, farmer after farmer, the majority of whom I might add were from my riding of Wild Rose, constantly came before the committee. I want to ensure that the government understands that not once have I heard any farmer in my riding say that they want the Canadian Wheat Board demolished or destroyed. That has never been the statement of farmers. That should be made perfectly clear. This came out of that member's mouth a number of times, about farmers wanting to destroy and demolish the wheat board. That just simply is not true and he knows it. He knows what he heard at that meeting.

Supply

They were talking about wanting to market their own goods, if they chose to do so, in a different manner through searching out niche markets or whatever means they wanted. They also talked about wanting to enter into value added processing and how the wheat board was interfering with that constantly.

I know what I heard. He knows what he heard. Would he care to stand today and correct some of the statements he made, which are completely out of whack?

Mr. Dick Proctor: Mr. Speaker, no, I am not going to correct anything I have said. While it is true that in Vulcan, Alberta speaker after speaker did oppose the single desk selling and had other ideas about it, the hon. member for Wild Rose was not at the other meetings that we held in western Canada where other people just as vehemently got to their feet to defend the Canadian Wheat Board. That was the point I was trying to make in the earlier answer.

There is some very significant debate taking place on the Prairies about the future of the board and it ought to take place with the farmers and farmer organizations, and not MPs and political parties deciding this in the House of Commons.

• (1740)

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, was the hon. member at the meeting in Davidson, Saskatchewan where the organic farmers and other speakers spoke out against the Canadian Wheat Board. Also, does he hold a Canadian Wheat Board permit book and how much land does he farm?

Mr. Dick Proctor: Mr. Speaker, yes, I was in Davidson on Tuesday, February 19, along with the hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar. No, I am not a farmer. I grew up on a farm but not in Saskatchewan.

The more important point that the hon. member raises is about the organic farmers. In the letter I referenced earlier from Elmer Laird, he said:

I have been an organic farmer for over 30 years. In order to market my wheat and barley I have to sell my grain to the Canadian Wheat Board and then buy it back to do my own marketing. Over the years I have known many certified organic farmers who have lost huge sums of money on sales because they didn't sell to a grain buyer who was bonded by the Canadian Grain Commission. Once his product was on the truck and out of sight, the producer lost control.

On the question raised by the member about how difficult it is for organic farmers, by no means is it evident that the solution she and her party propose would have any better effect or result for organic farmers.

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, was the member also with the committee at Grand Prairie where farmer after farmer spoke against the wheat board?

Mr. Dick Proctor: Mr. Speaker, I was at Grand Prairie and I am glad the hon. member mentioned that. I was also in Grand Prairie in 1999 when the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food was present. That was a very obstreperous meeting and a completely different meeting than the one in February, 2002.

Supply

I do not recall the member being at the meeting in Grand Prairie, but my memory may be failing. I certainly remember the meetings and they were two entirely different meetings with very significant views that did not reflect the position of the Canadian Alliance on this issue today.

Mr. Myron Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I have just a quick comment. I was at the Grand Prairie meeting as well. The member said I was at only one, in Vulcan. I was at Grand Prairie. I know what I heard. He knows what I heard.

He never answered my question about the value added idea that people have tried to pursue and are unable to because of the Wheat Board. Could he please explain to the House why it is just not possible to enter into value added producing because of the situation as it is?

• (1745)

Mr. Dick Proctor: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it there are two competing priorities on value added. I think it is fair to say that all politicians in the House, regardless of party, would like to see more value added, especially in the Canadian Prairies. It is one of the things that we were told was going to be a benefit of free trade and it has been pretty doggone slow in coming.

As I understand it, the difficulty with the situation in terms of pasta plants and the like is that the concept of single desk selling is price pooling, that is, everyone gets the same price for it. The problem is that if someone is then hiving off some especially top quality durum to go to a pasta plant, and if it does not seem to be viable for the company and the company says it has to have an incentive to buy the product, that seems to take away from the concept of price pooling. Therein lies the conundrum.

The Wheat Board says that it is continuing to work with these pasta plants and others who would like to do value added. Certainly this party would like to see that. It has not been resolved, but I do not think it is for lack of effort. I think there are a couple of competing principles. Maybe they can work it out. I do not know.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am not going to get my full 20 minutes with only 10 minutes left, but if possible I would like to split what little time I have with my colleague from Dauphin—Swan River who has been sitting here patiently, as have I. Therefore I am going to take as little time as possible.

It was said earlier by the leader of the official opposition that perhaps we should pander to the producers and maybe we can get more votes in those areas. I simply would like to say that this is not an issue about votes. This is an issue about principle. It is an issue about the opportunity to have choice and to do what one wants to do. As a producer and a farmer in my area, I represent those producers and farmers. Some agree with the Canadian Wheat Board and some disagree. There is no unanimity. As the minister responsible said, if we put farmers in a room there would be a number of different positions taken with respect to the Canadian Wheat Board.

However, I firmly believe that the reason we are wearing these poppies today is that people fought to give us the opportunity to have choice in our own lives. That choice in producers' lives is to have the opportunity to market.

I am going to talk about a couple of issues. First, members talked about the value added. The fact of the matter is that there is value added processing on the Prairies. Unfortunately, it is value added processing in those commodities that are totally off board. In my area we have a substantial number of canola crushers. The reason we have canola crushers is that canola is a non-board commodity. Industry has access to those commodities and industry has set those plants in my area because it makes sense and it is profitable. That is not there for wheat and the durum plants and the pasta plants. The member for Selkirk—Interlake talked about the oat processing plant, CanOat. CanOat uses a non-board commodity. That plant was built there because that industry has access to a commodity it needs to continue its operations. Therefore, value added has happened on the Prairies, and it happens to be with, unfortunately, the non-board grains.

Let me say this about non-board grains. I take a lot of pride in saying that oats were originally a board grain. Oats were taken outside of the board by a gentleman for whom I have an awful lot of respect, a gentleman who was the minister of agriculture in this House, a gentleman by the name of Charlie Mayer. He took oats out of the board because he felt it was the best thing to do.

Members of the House must recognize that the Canadian Wheat Board was brought in as an institution in 1919. In 1935 it was officially enacted through legislation. It was voluntary then. In 1943 it was made mandatory. The reason I mention those dates is that 1919, 1935 and 1943 were a long time ago. A lot of things have changed in our country and in this world since 1919. Charlie Mayer recognized that and moved oats out of the board because he knew that producers could then market their own commodity without the help of the board. In fact it has been a huge success.

That same minister of agriculture, Charlie Mayer, was just about there with barley. He took it out of the board, but as was mentioned earlier unfortunately he did not have the opportunity of taking it to the full degree and having it totally taken out of the board. Unfortunately it was put back in the board when another government came into play. The reason I mention this is that some of my producers would fight to the death to maintain the Canadian Wheat Board, while others would do the opposite, but a decision must be made by those same producers on which way they want to market.

Those producers are not silly people. They are business people. Farming today is a business. It is not something one does as a hobby. Those same producers now grow commodities that they can market themselves. They are growing non-board commodities because they can market better and make more money. What is happening right now is that the yield of wheat is dropping dramatically, not just because of a drought but because producers do not want to grow something they have to sell to a board when they do not want to.

What will happen? Eventually there will not be any wheat. As soon as the producers can get a crop that can go into rotation and they can do away with wheat, the Canadian Wheat Board will no longer be a factor in this whole equation because it is not going to exist.

I want to now turn my time over to my colleague from Dauphin—Swan River who will carry on with this debate.

• (1750)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I would tend to agree with the hon. member, but I need the unanimous consent of the House not to proceed with questions and comments. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the PC Party has the position that farmers would vote on this, which is different from what the Canadian Alliance would do. Is it the position of the PC Party that the 50.1% of farmers who want a monopoly can impose on the other 49% of farmers, i.e. 45,000 farmers, that they cannot do what is in their own best interests economically?

Mr. Rick Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, fortunately we do live in a democracy. I believe very strongly that producers want to have a say in how they market their own goods. We as a party are saying to give producers an honest, open question so that they themselves can give their own say as to how they want to market. Yes, if it is 51% to 49%, in a democracy 51% in fact does make for a winning team and a winning vote.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recall that back in 1997-98 when we were beginning the debate about how to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act, the hon. gentleman from Brandon and I had a number of very animated conversations about what needed to be done. Quite frankly, I would say that his views did have an important impact on the legislation that finally emerged.

He raised earlier in the House today a question having to do with \$7 billion in ongoing debt charges relating to previous trade in Canadian Wheat Board grains. His question was whether or not the existence of that debt in some way obligated the Government of Canada to the continuance of the Canadian Wheat Board. I simply want to tell him that it is in fact guaranteed by the Government of Canada. All of that debt originated prior to 1993. None of it has come up since 1993. It has nothing to do with the continued existence of the Canadian Wheat Board. It is an obligation of the Government of Canada whether or not the Canadian Wheat Board exists.

Mr. Rick Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the numbers for the year ending for 1993, but I will get them. I do believe that some of this debt certainly has been incurred since 1993 and I will find out just how much that is. In fact it is a guarantee from the government. It is \$7 billion that has to be accounted for as a liability when and if the Canadian Wheat Board no longer exists. I do thank the minister for giving me that answer. I will find out the amount from 1993.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, PC): Mr. Speaker, the first comment I will make is that this week my constituents are raising the question of why is the government, whether it accepts the responsibility or not, putting farmers in jail for selling their own product? In essence this is the message that they see on television.

I have been a member of Parliament since 1997. I know that in the constituency of Dauphin—Swan River the majority of farmers support the Wheat Board. The reason is the history of being a farmer. Most of the people in Dauphin—Swan river are of an older age. They remember the Depression. That is the reason the Wheat Board became a reality.

I would say that the older the farmer, the greater the support for the Wheat Board. The younger farmer tends to move toward choice. Also, the farther the farmer is from the U.S. border, there is a greater tendency to support the Wheat Board.

The reality is that for a small producing country such as Canada to have 20% of the monopoly in the world is quite a feat. However, as my colleague from Brandon—Souris stated, this is 2002 and things do change and farmers do want choice. I am told that farmers want choice in terms of marketing their own product.

As members have said, farmers put in investment dollars. They want to have the choice of where to sell their product. Probably the easiest way around the problem is to give farmers the choice and perhaps peg it with a limited term. If a farmer elected to opt out, then for the next five years the farmer would not be selling under the board.

Farmers are interested in more than just the Wheat Board. They are really interested in what the country is doing about our food industry. When we look at the food industry as a whole, there are a lot of problems that are much bigger than marketing the product. Value added has been mentioned. Rural Canada is losing its population. There are no jobs in rural Canada. All the jobs are moving to the big cities.

That is the position of the people of Dauphin—Swan River.

• (1755)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Order. It being 5:55 p.m., it is my duty to inform the House that proceedings on the motion have expired.

[*Translation*]

The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

SUPREME COURT OF CANADA APPOINTEES

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance) moved:

Private Members' Business

That, in the opinion of this House, appointees and potential appointees to the positions of Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada should receive parliamentary scrutiny, and that Standing Orders 110 and 111 of the House of Commons should be amended to include such appointees and potential appointees.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a subject that is not only near and dear to my heart but I think it is near and dear to the hearts of all Canadian Alliance members in the House. I hope it is also near and dear to the hearts of many others.

We are calling for appointees to the Supreme Court to be reviewed by a committee of the House, presumably the justice committee, and that Standing Orders 110 and 111 be amended. Standing Order 110 (1) states:

A Minister of the Crown shall lay upon the Table a certified copy of an Order in Council, stating that a certain individual has been appointed to a certain non-judicial post—

Standing Order 110(2) is basically the same situation.

Judicial appointments are excluded from being tabled in the House and being reviewed by the appropriate committee. When I was drafting the motion, I recognized the independence of the judiciary and therefore made my motion specific to the Supreme Court of Canada, not to the Federal Court and other courts that are appointed by the Prime Minister. The reason is quite obvious.

We all know that judicial activism has taken over in this land. We are now subject to huge influence by the Supreme Court of Canada, by nine judges who sit on the court unelected. They are appointed by the Prime Minister in a process that nobody knows how, and nobody is asked for any specific input. There is no transparency, no openness, nothing. All of a sudden a name is foisted upon Canadians by the Prime Minister and there it is, and we are stuck.

In this day and age where we think and say that we live in a democracy, I find it appalling that we would even tolerate the situation where our Supreme Court judges have been given the responsibility under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to pronounce on the laws that are passed in the House. We used to be the highest court in the land and I guess if we read the Constitution of Canada, it still says we are the highest court in the land.

We pass legislation in the House and when it gets reviewed in that house down the street called the Supreme Court of Canada, it puts its stamp of yea or nay on it and says it will not have that particular piece of legislation, out it goes. We then get the feeling that it thinks it is the highest court in the land.

Recently the Supreme Court ruled on the voting rights for prisoners. In a split decision of five to four, the court said that all prisoners, and it does not matter why they are in jail or how heinous their crime was, will have the right to vote. They will determine who shall make the laws of the land even though we in the House said prisoners cannot vote.

It gets down there and is reviewed by the Supreme Court of Canada. Voting rights is in a section of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We cannot exercise the notwithstanding clause, even if we wanted to, because that particular section is exempt from the

notwithstanding clause. The court is the last word on that particular issue.

The court is deciding public policy. It is striking down legislation that is proposed by this place, the highest court in the land. It is only evident that we be allowed to review these appointments.

I will read some editorials that appeared in the paper. I am looking at the *National Post* of August 8, 2002 which stated:

Rather than the Prime Minister having sole responsibility, the cross-partisan Justice Committee would be able to review each appointee. [The motion] seems a responsible proposal: What better use could there be for a Justice Committee than protecting the integrity of the country's highest court. The motion is up for debate next month, and all MPs should give it serious consideration. With Parliament deferring its toughest decisions to the bench, the least MPs can do is take responsibility for who's sitting on it.

The *Calgary Herald* of February 9, 2002 stated:

Appointments should be reviewed by the Commons—hearings would illuminate a procedure that today is, frankly, opaque.

• (1800)

The *Edmonton Journal* of February 6, 2002 stated:

A hearing before Parliament or a committee... might demystify the judiciary by revealing the human side of judging. This could help the public to see how judges are chosen, and how they think.

The *Hamilton Spectator* of February 6, 2002 stated:

There is a compelling case for a parliamentary search and screening committee, mandated to provide a full public report to the House of Commons... A new, improved selection process should be on Ottawa's agenda.

Finally, the *National Post* of February 6, 2002 stated:

The most attractive system for staffing the court would be to have a powerful, politically balanced, cross-party parliamentary committee to vet the Prime Minister's nominees.

The media is in favour of it. The public is in favour of it. A poll conducted by Environics in January indicated that two-thirds of Canadians want to elect justices to the Supreme Court. I am not proposing we go that far, but let us just put a little bit of clarity and transparency into who is getting those jobs so that we can question whether they reflect Canadian society and the views and opinions of Canadian society today.

I recall watching the television news in 1982, 20 years ago, on the day the Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into being. I remember the newscaster saying, "Today folks, we have this new document, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that is going to impact on Canadian society. We do not know how it will impact on Canadian society; we will have to wait and see".

We have waited and we have seen and some of us do not like what we have seen. The Supreme Court has pronounced on many issues from sexual morality to spousal definition to who can vote. Prisoners can vote. The court has gone through a wide variety of cases and stated, "This shall be the public policy of Canada".

Who elected the judges? Who chose them and from what position do they make those pronouncements? I find it very discouraging. Canada is one of the great places in the world, one that says we promote democracy.

Private Members' Business

Just yesterday we had to fight tooth and nail to have a secret ballot to elect committee chairs in the House so we can wrest that appointment power away from the Prime Minister. Here again today, the very next day, I am arguing that we take some more power away from the Prime Minister and bring it back into the House, like the election of committee chairs, because we are the highest court in the land.

It is not the Prime Minister and the Privy Council that is the highest court of the land. It is this House. Let us bring that back to us in this place where we can ensure that these things get a proper hearing.

We all know about the vote that went on yesterday, the decision and political drama as we wrested that power away from the Prime Minister and brought it back into the House.

We understand that today the procedure and House affairs committee tabled a report that said all private members' bills will be votable. What a wonderful thing. We can celebrate that we in this House will actually be given the right to vote on our own bills. This is a power that theoretically we have always had but it was being grabbed by the government, by the Prime Minister and by the cabinet. They hung on to it dearly as if their lives depended on it, but slowly we are getting that back. I think we should also look at Supreme Court justices.

Mr. Speaker, I know this motion is not votable. Therefore, in the interest of the reform that we have seen in the last couple of days, I ask that you seek unanimous consent that Motion No. 79 be made a votable motion.

● (1805)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The House has heard the terms of the proposal. Is there unanimous consent to make this item a votable item?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): There is no consent. The hon. member still has five minutes remaining.

Mr. John Williams: Mr. Speaker, that is disappointing.

Let us note for the record that Liberal members said there should be no unanimous consent. Let us also note for the record that circumstances were such in the last few days that a number of Liberal members, who have been shaking in their shoes because the Prime Minister has been all powerful in the House for far too many years, broke ranks and said "Yes, we can do it, we can make these decisions for ourselves". However it was a fleeting moment because we can see it has gone again, evaporated into the air.

The power of the Prime Minister goes right through the government benches even when he is not sitting here. Liberal members feel, in some way, shape or form that they cannot exercise the powers that are given to them as members of Parliament. They have the power; we have the power. We all have the power to make these rules.

All I asked was that the motion be votable. If they do not agree with the motion they could vote against it. That was what the

government House leader was trying to make light of in the defeat yesterday, saying that it was a free vote so it did not matter.

If they do not like this, let them stand in their place, say they do not like it and vote against it. Let them go back home and tell their constituents how they either represented them in the House by standing and speaking about some process that provided some clarity and transparency to the choice of our Supreme Court justices, or let them go back home and tell their constituents that the power of the Prime Minister exuded right over the government's side and they shook in their shoes, they did not have the fortitude to make a motion votable. Shame on them. It does speak for the low level of democracy in this country.

I spend a lot time, as many people know, speaking out against corruption. I have a great deal of faith in the integrity of the people in our courts and our Supreme Court. These are people who give what they feel is best for the country. I do not always agree with their decisions. That is not the point. The point is that I have no problem with them having the authority to make these pronouncements. We have a notwithstanding clause over most of what they speak of. We can stand in our places and represent the society we were elected to represent.

I have a constituency back in Alberta called St. Albert. The culture and the society in Alberta is a little different than in Toronto, the Maritimes or British Columbia. This is a vast, varied and wonderful country in which we live. I represent the people of St. Albert and everybody else represents a different part of the country here. Collectively we make decisions.

However to run away from decisions is a different thing. If we run away from making these decisions and allow a government, not just this government, to think that it holds this place in its hand, then this is no longer an institution of accountability. We are a lapdog instead of a watchdog and more corrupt things could be done.

Transparency International has rated this country one of the better non-corrupt countries in the world. Thank goodness for that. We read in the paper of countries like the Ukraine and Zimbabwe that also have elected parliaments and an executive. In Zimbabwe the executive feels that it can turn people out of their farms and livelihoods and turn them out into the streets, and allow murder and other atrocities to be committed. It can do that with impunity because its elected house refuses to hold the executive accountable. It is that simple. In all other countries where the executive gets away with murder, maybe not that much, but get away with corruption, it starts because the elected house does not do its job. I find it unfortunate that Liberal members would deny making this motion votable.

● (1810)

It shows me that they are going to run away from their responsibilities rather than stand up and tell their executive that it is accountable in this land just like everyone else.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Motion No. M-79 introduced by my hon. colleague, the member for St. Albert. It proposes that appointees and potential appointees to the Supreme Court of Canada should receive parliamentary scrutiny.

I take exception to the suggestion from the hon. member that if members on this side do not agree with him, we are therefore succumbing to the influence of the Prime Minister or that we are not acting independently or whatever. I wonder if it occurs to him that that kind of suggestion is itself undemocratic. Suggesting that we must agree with him or else we are making decisions for the wrong reason is entirely undemocratic. It is a remarkable comment coming from someone who puts himself forward as someone who believes strongly in democracy. It is not very democratic in itself.

The motion further proposes that Standing Orders 110 and 111 of the House of Commons should be amended to include such appointees and potential appointees.

[Translation]

I would like to start with a quote from the Prime Minister:

The Supreme Court of Canada plays a fundamental role in our democratic society, in particular as the ultimate guardian of the values entrenched in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms—

It is therefore essential for its members to be selected from among the most distinguished and most competent of jurists.

[English]

The current appointment process for Supreme Court judges, including that of the chief justice, is based on over 130 years of tradition and precedence and has been successful in achieving those very results that I spoke of a moment ago, and reiterated by the Prime Minister. It is true that the executive has discretion in the selection and appointment of Supreme Court justices.

[Translation]

Supreme Court appointments are made after extensive consultations between the Minister of Justice and senior judges, solicitors general, representatives and senior members of bar associations, provincial governments and other well informed individuals in the region where the candidate selection must take place.

Merit is the sole element taken into consideration when a Supreme Court justice is selected. Again in the words of the Prime Minister:

The proposed candidate must be held in the highest esteem by the legal community.

• (1815)

[English]

In making appointment decisions, qualities such as outstanding intellectual capacity, superior ability in judgment writing, the capacity for innovative thinking on emerging legal issues, and a demonstrated sensitivity to the diverse values contained in the charter are sought. These criteria, coupled with the traditional consultation process with respect to appointments to the Supreme Court of Canada, have proved highly successful in producing judges of the greatest distinction and ability for the court.

The quality of appointments to this court over the past three decades has received almost universal praise. From what I have seen of the U.S. experience it would seem to indicate that confirmation hearings achieve little in improving the quality of appointments to that nation's supreme court.

[Translation]

If we adopt an approval process that is similar to that of the Americans, we risk politicizing the appointment of judges, and this would not be in Canadians' best interest. We must approach these proposals with caution, therefore.

[English]

Providing for parliamentary scrutiny of appointments to the Supreme Court could deter some excellent candidates because of the ordeal of public and potentially partisan hearings. This for me is a serious and sincere concern. As the learned scholar Ed Ratushny observed:

...a prominent feature of many U.S. confirmation hearings has been personal attacks on nominees without respect for their dignity as human beings, let alone as Supreme Court judges.

Clarence Thomas said after his confirmation hearing:

If someone wanted to block me because they don't like the composition of the Court, that's fine. But to destroy me—I would have preferred an assassin's bullet to this kind of living hell that they have put me and my family through.

Scrutiny of these appointments would also impose constraints upon a government seeking to appoint a Supreme Court judge whose excellence as a jurist and as a person is universally acclaimed.

[Translation]

As well, care should be taken to ensure that any proposal for parliamentary scrutiny of court appointments does not undermine the independence of the judiciary.

[English]

Our judicial appointments system ensures the independence of the judiciary. Judges hold office doing good behaviour; judges enjoy certain legal immunities for anything they say or do in court; and only in rare cases would an inquiry be launched that would lead to the removal of a judge.

We must therefore, for all these reasons, be cautious when considering any changes to the appointment of judges.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, allow me to thank the member for St. Albert for raising this important debate in the House. I think that this is a fundamental issue that deserves to be studied and examined, and we need to come up with solutions to this system that is not as functional as it could be.

To begin with, I agree with the observation made by the member for St. Albert. The current system for appointing judges to the Supreme Court is not transparent, is highly secretive and runs counter to our society's democratic values. At a time when judges wield tremendous powers, particularly with the increasing political role of the courts following the adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, judges exert more and more influence over society.

Unlike superior court judges, who must go through an exhaustive appointment process—information on the process can be found on the Canadian Judicial Council website—there is nothing for appeal court and Supreme Court judges. Judicial appointments to appeal courts for all of the provinces are decided exclusively by the Prime Minister.

There is a very old saying in law: not only must justice be done, it must appear to be done. The current system raises doubts with respect to the appointments that are made. Let me give two examples.

Last summer, Marie Deschamps was appointed a judge of the Supreme Court of Canada by the Prime Minister, and Michel Robert was appointed a judge of the Quebec Court of Appeal. It so happens that Marie Deschamps is the spouse of Paul Corbeil, a former Liberal minister in Quebec City, and Michel Robert was the president of the Liberal Party of Canada from 1986 to 1990.

Let me be clear, I am not saying that Justices Deschamps and Robert are not qualified to perform their duties as judges. I am not saying they do not deserve their appointment. I am just saying that doubt was raised in the minds of many as to why they were appointed. Was it only on the basis of their competence, or was it also—degrees may vary from person to person—because they belonged to the great Liberal family?

I am not alone in thinking this way. The issue was raised by Yves Boisvert, in *La Presse* on June 28, 2002, as well as by editorial writers in *The Gazette* on June 29, 2002, in the *National Post* on July 2, 2002, again in *The Gazette* on August 10, 2002 and in the *Globe and Mail* and the *London Free Press* on the same day. They raised the issue of the Liberal connections of the nominees, because decisions are made behind closed doors and left totally to the discretion of the Prime Minister. And this can only damage the good reputation of our legal system. I therefore agree with what the hon. member for St. Albert said.

I am not sure, though, that his solution is necessarily the right one. I am not sure that having judges appear before the Standing Committee on Justice is the right thing to do. When I asked people around me, who are in the legal profession as I am, many raised the issue of the independence of the judiciary from the legislative branch. I stress that these are doubts shared by many members of the public.

• (1820)

I would suggest the following compromise to my colleague—and I hope he is listening. About a week and a half ago, I introduced motion M-288 in the House. It reads:

That the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights examine the process of appointing justices to the appeal courts and to the Supreme Court of Canada.

This then is a broader motion than that of my colleague, and one that would not be prejudicial—if I may use that term, in order to make a play on words—to solving the problem of the present lack of transparency in appointments to the judiciary.

I would also point out to him—and I hope he is still listening—that this very day I have asked the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, in the context of a meeting on future business, to examine a motion similar to the one I have read, M-288, so as to

have the committee address this matter. The decision will be made Monday in connection with future business.

I suggest that the hon. member for St. Albert tell his colleagues in the Alliance who are members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, to support my proposal to have that committee examine the procedure for appointing judges to the Appeal Court and to the Supreme Court, and not to prejudge the outcome but rather to allow this question to be looked at with as open a mind as possible. The approach needs to be one of offering constructive solutions so that all members of this House, that is all those who support the present system, as my Liberal colleague has said, as well as those who would like to see changes, might have an open discussion to examine in depth the problem we have before us, a problem that deserves a solution.

• (1825)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate in the House. I am also pleased to hear the comments and the speech made by my friend, the member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, who always presents an important, intelligent and sometimes somewhat provocative perspective.

[English]

This is a very important motion. The member for St. Albert has presented us with a very important issue for debate. The motion touches on a subject matter that we in the Progressive Conservative Party have discussed, most recently at a convention in Edmonton where we very much touched on the subject matter presented by Motion No. 79.

The motion clearly recommends that we change the way in which members of the Supreme Court of Canada receive positions on the bench. This is certainly a subject matter that deserves greater scrutiny and greater contemplation of change. In recent years Canadians have become increasingly concerned about the appearance that courts have encroached upon the supremacy of Canadian Parliament by reading into our laws interpretations that appear in many cases to be inconsistent or outside the intent of the laws as passed by Parliament.

This is of course a direct result of the adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Without a doubt, the adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was the most empowering document for the Supreme Court, or its ability at least, to strike down laws passed by the Parliament of Canada.

In the past year we have borne witness to a number of cases at the Supreme Court level which have very much taken away or at the very least eroded the concept of the supremacy of Parliament and which in many cases seem to contradict societal views and values that Canadians hold dear. I need only cite the case of John Robin Sharpe. In that recent decision, individuals were permitted or in effect allowed to embark upon or invoke a defence of artistic merit when discussing the possession of child pornography. Without getting into the esoteric argument of what is in many instances a landmark case, we have to time and time again go back to the values, the principles and the wishes of ordinary Canadians when we are discussing matters of societal values.

Private Members' Business

A friend of mine who is currently practising law expressed the opinion that there can be no doubt that those who sit on the highest court in the land have outstanding academic laurels, but to the everyday, ordinary Canadian they too often seem to be lacking in pragmatic and, sometimes, practical experience to ensure that the will of the people and the will of individuals is properly represented in these decisions. That is not said with any disrespect. It is simply stating what is perhaps the obvious: that their course in life and their ascent to the Supreme Court of Canada has in essence sanitized them or distanced them from the everyday experience that Canadians are living, for example, Canadians who do not understand how the court could allow the potential endangerment of children by accepting this definition of artistic merit as a defence, which highlights that disconnect.

All of this is to say that scrutiny by members of Parliament of appointees to the highest court in the land would go a long way in determining the suitability and the appropriateness of those individuals who aspire and wish to serve, and it could possibly allow for, I believe, a greater recognition or reflection of present day values.

To many it seems that the "reading in" of the intent of laws by courts and by judges seems to be in some ways a violation of very basic constitutional principles, that is to say, Parliament makes laws, the executive implements them, and the courts in many cases naturally interpret them, but reading in to laws very often steps over that sometimes very blurry line. The root of this perception of judicial activism is that the 1982 Constitution Act included for the first time in Canada a constitutionally entrenched guarantee of civil rights through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which required courts to determine the constitutionality of laws in light of the charter.

• (1830)

Again, without getting into an academic debate about the merits of the charter, we had a system that evolved much differently. It is more in line with that of the United Kingdom where it was not so much Cartesian thinking, where everything was written down, but was more in keeping with the tradition of what was not written down, where what was not documented was acceptable.

I would say that Canada in essence has taken part of what is more like an American model, one of rights that are clearly enunciated and written down, and has tried to superimpose that onto our current system, which evolved in a different way through the British traditions of constitutional law. That is not to say that there is not a clear recognition that Canada evolved as two founding nations coming together as one. There is very much the civil code, which is also reflected in our constitutional law. Some have argued that this evolution has allowed for an erosion of the supremacy of Parliament, in which place democratic accountability has been replaced by the supremacy of the Constitution as interpreted by the Supreme Court. The motion before us would allow for greater public scrutiny and therefore I reinforce the sentiment of believing that public confidence in the process without jeopardizing judicial independence is extremely important. My colleague from Charlevoix also talked about how the perception that justice is being done is as equally important as justice actually being done, and about the confidence that therefore flows from that.

In our party's democratic reform package that was accepted and passed in Edmonton in August, we made a number of suggestions, which included a recommendation similar to that which is brought forward by my friend from St. Albert today. One was the recommendation that the name and qualifications of any person proposed for appointment by the Prime Minister to the Supreme Court of Canada shall be presented to Parliament, which shall, after debate, make a recommendation on the suitability of that nominee's candidacy. It is the way in which it is presented, I suppose, and the practical application of this that very much makes up where we go from here in adapting this motion. Further, a vote in the House of Commons should be conducted and the outcome communicated to the governor in council prior to any such appointment being made.

I do not believe for a moment that the intent of my hon. friend's motion is to follow in essence the American example, which allows for, in some cases, the spectacle of delving into every dark corner of an individual candidate's life. That, I truly believe, would diminish further the respect for and legitimacy of an appointee.

In essence what I am saying is that we have to be clear in putting certain parameters around the process that is envisioned. We do not want to, for example, draw attention to the finances or the personal life choices of an individual. There is a cost to doing so, just as there is a cost to the denigration that sometimes occurs of all professions, including our own. There is a cost to deterring individuals from taking that step, from offering to become a judge. Many in the practice of law make more money in that practice than they would if they were to accept an appointment to the bench. That is simply a reality one has to be cognizant of. Clearly we want to have the best people, the best minds, the best individuals, assume these positions. That is truly the spirit and the intent behind my friend's motion.

There is no need for a committee to examine financial records of a candidate or the financial records of a spouse. I do not believe that this type of information would be relevant. Similarly, I am sure the motion is aimed at empowering the role of judges in the country. I see a committee process as an opportunity to allow parliamentarians, acting as representatives in the stead of their constituents and Canadians, to have the chance to delve into some of the beliefs of appointees, for example, through previous decisions that they may have rendered. As I said, no one wants to see an American style of confirmation hearing.

I very much support the principle behind the motion. It is an interesting, timely and important one. I hope that we allow Canadians to further discuss and engage in this process. I am hopeful that with the new and enlightened attitude in this place we in fact will see a day when Supreme Court judges are appointed with greater input by Parliament.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this private member's motion put forward by my colleague from St. Albert, an experienced and fine parliamentarian himself. I also appreciate the comments made by my two colleagues who spoke after the member for St. Albert.

Private Members' Business

• (1835)

I particularly agreed with the comments of my colleague from Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough and specifically with his concerns about us not going to a U.S. style system. He is quite right about that. If we look at the American system and its most recent experiences with the senate confirmation process of supreme court nominees, I think he is quite right. We can look at the example of Robert Bork, when he was nominated by President Reagan and what he went through and how the court became so politicized in that process, and the example of the confirmation process of Clarence Thomas and how that became so politicized.

I think of the American example that my colleague raised. As we all know, yesterday was election day in the United States. In the state of New Hampshire, Jeanne Shaheen, the Democratic incumbent governor, was running for the senate against John Sununu. John Sununu's father was chief of staff to the first President Bush. She had a campaign rally on Monday night to try to get out the vote for the Tuesday election. It was quite something. She was asked by reporters if she were elected to the U.S. senate what she would do when President George W. Bush puts forward nominees for the Supreme Court. She said she would stand firm on a woman's right to choose and would not vote for the confirmation of any justice who does not agree with her view as a legislator on *Roe v. Wade*, which is the enabling legislation to allow women have the right to choose to have an abortion in the United States.

I found it very fascinating. Because of the confirmation process it has become politicized. It goes to the United States senate and the United States senators themselves at the judiciary committee vote up or down on whether or not people become justices of the U.S. supreme court. It was fascinating that somebody running for office, in order to get out the vote, politicized the process itself by saying that regardless of the person's qualifications, regardless of who the president puts forward, regardless of what that person's background is and so on, she as an individual senator would not vote to confirm that person because of that person's view on this one previous court decision. From what I understand Governor Shaheen is not a lawyer and has never been a justice herself, but it shows that the politicization of the courts in the process can be very dangerous, which is why the language of the motion put forward by my colleague from St. Albert is very helpful.

Specifically, the motion states:

That, in the opinion of this House, appointees and potential appointees to the positions of Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada should receive parliamentary scrutiny, and that Standing Orders 110 and 111 of the House of Commons should be amended to include such appointees and potential appointees.

It is important to note that Standing Orders 110 and 111 referred to in the motion are those which currently allow the vetting by a House of Commons standing committee of certain individuals who have been appointed to non-judicial posts. In many ways, the motion is merely extending a principle already been accepted by the House to encompass one of the most influential positions in the land. The power, the role, of the Supreme Court over public policy and in the lives of Canadians is immense.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms and programs like the Court Challenges Program give Canadian citizens an extraordinary power,

one not found in many other democracies. Citizens can ask the courts to declare illegal a law that has been passed by the Canadian Parliament. In a system of checks and balances, this is one check that truly puts power into the hands of everyday Canadians.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is not just some legal codification of some legal rights that we think might be a good idea. There is a principle behind any bill of rights, be it the American bill of rights, the bill of rights that Voltaire was talking about, or the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The principle behind a bill of rights is that we try to codify natural law: that human beings have some rights. No matter who is elected, no matter what their campaign platform is, no matter how many people vote for them, human beings have core human rights that cannot be infringed upon no matter the democratic choice and the will of the majority. The fact that a citizen can take a political decision made by the state and politicians straight to the courts and say "I think this violates my charter rights" is a power that is unheard of in the vast majority of countries on this planet.

But here is what is interesting, and I have to make this point, which partly fuels the concerns of many people in our country. I have to make a point here of mentioning Professor Ted Morton and Professor Rainer Knopff, two professors at the University of Calgary who have done extraordinary academic work in studying Canada's judicial system and how it can be cleaned up to be more reflective of not necessarily a democratic society but a society that lives and understands the rule of law and the balancing of that supremacy of Parliament.

• (1840)

With that in mind, on the Supreme Court of Canada website one will find an address by Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin, where she says the following:

Twenty years ago, Canada came of full constitutional age with the patriation of the Constitution and enactment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter is a uniquely Canadian document and a product of our distinctive history. It is also the product, not just of politicians, but of ordinary Canadians who worked tirelessly to ensure that it would reflect their vision of Canada...

Here is the punch line:

Accordingly, Canadian courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada, must constantly strive to reflect these values in their decisions.

What Chief Justice McLachlin is implying is that the Constitution is a living, breathing document, that it is not a set in stone, firm constitutional model that tries to codify human rights, and not just legal rights, and that her position as a supreme court justice, and indeed as the head of the supreme court, is not to take legislation from the Parliament and hold it up against the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and ensure that people's core rights are balanced with the political rights established in legislation. She says that the Supreme Court of Canada, "must constantly strive to reflect these values in their decisions". What she is suggesting is not an objective legal role for the courts but in fact a subjective role, where the court gets to decide and ensure that the law is passed by the Parliament of Canada and ratified by the Senate, and that these laws reflect the values that were inherent in the individual charter.

Private Members' Business

That kind of attitude is frightening. It is a legitimate position for somebody to have, particularly somebody who is aspiring to become a federal judge or a Supreme Court justice, but it has to be challenged. There are legitimate reasons why it is a frightening position.

This motion and the idea behind this motion would be to have these Supreme Court nominees come before a committee to challenge them on that view. Is the Constitution in fact a living, interpretive document or is legislation interpretive that should be held up against a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that codifies the rights of people and legislation gets interpreted and not the Constitution itself? It is a very delicate balance.

The concerns that a number of Canadians have about the active nature of a supreme court, a supreme court looking at the subjective nature of legislation, is that it sees its role as an evolving role in protecting the values that were inherent when the Constitution was drafted in 1982 and imposed on Canada almost unilaterally. On se souvient aussi. These are legitimate concerns, not abstract academic concerns. These are concerns that have a real impact on public policy.

In recent years, Canada's Supreme Court has had to deal with a variety of tough issues, ranging from the clarity act, to same sex couples having more rights, to cigarette warnings, to the status of school boards and to the religiosity of school boards. These are real concerns. The courts having unilateral power over these kind of decisions is a frightening thing.

We hear conversations and see rumours in the newspapers that the Minister of Justice is considering bringing before the House legislation to change the definition of marriage. Basically there are four ways that the federal Parliament can go. First, we can continue the status quo, which is that marriage is the union between one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others. Second, we can amend the definition of marriage to include same sex couples. Third, the governments can get out of marriage altogether and say that if two people love each other regardless of who they are it is none of the business of politicians or government to get involved in their lives. Fourth, the government could go down the road of establishing some sort of civil union, which is in essence an expanded concept of the legality of marriage. Four very different public policy perspectives, four very different tracks that we can go down, but that is a debate that should happen in the House of Commons.

The institution of marriage is historic. The institution of marriage and its impact on our social culture, on our economy and on how we organize ourselves as human beings in communities, is a fundamentally difficult question to address. However that question should be reflected here in the House of Commons. It should be addressed through free votes in the House of Commons. I would say quite honestly to the House, I believe, as only I can speak as a Canadian Alliance member of Parliament, that there would be a broad diversity of views on that issue within the official opposition.

Those are the sorts of issues that need to be addressed in the House. We need to vet Supreme Court justices to ensure that they understand the proper legal role of the courts, the proper legal role of the House of Commons and the proper legal role of the bureaucracy, if they have different perspectives on those things. Those things need

to be understood, need to be vetted and people need to be accountable.

• (1845)

I applaud my colleague for St. Albert for trying to establish a greater transparency in trying to bring some clarity to this issue. It is an important motion. It puts it in the right direction. I appreciate his motion and I fully support it.

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we have listened to the debate. We have had members on the government side saying not to touch the process because it is working so well. However it is not working so well. We heard four members from the opposition say that it was time for change.

I cannot overemphasize the fact that the polls are saying people want change. My friend from Nova Scotia has pointed out that people have the capacity to read into the law things that we never thought were there.

Society has changed in the 20 years since we have had the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. For example, in 1960 we had as a public policy residential schools in the country. Today the notion of residential schools is the worst thing that we could ever imagine. Back in the sixties we had a different opinion on sexual morality than we have today. They could not have envisioned what we have today for sexual morality.

Society has changed. We wrote the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as society was in 1982. We are asking our courts to interpret it today in the year 2002. However we have a different perspective on society. What was debated back in 1982 in this Chamber about the powers to be given to the courts and the powers that would be contained in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms has moved far beyond anything that we could have envisioned. We have rulings coming out of the Supreme Court that would have made people's hair stand on end in 1982. Yet today it is business as usual coming out of the Supreme Court.

Imagine people standing in the House in 1982 and saying that people like Clifford Olson and Paul Bernardo could not only vote in a general election, but it was their right to vote in a general election was guaranteed. My goodness, we would have gone berserk in 1982. Now we just take it in our stride because the Supreme Court has made that pronouncement.

There are different ways that the Supreme Court has ruled in the last 20 years that would never have been thought of in 1982. Yet this murky process of osmosis, of let the best brains bubble to the top, as proposed by our Liberal friends, is the best way for the country to have a Supreme Court justice foisted upon it. Is this the right way and the best way?

I am not looking for a witch hunt. I am not looking for us to bring them in, throw them to the wolves and see if they can stand the pressure. I am just saying that if we are to give nine unelected people the right to determine what this society can or cannot do, we as a society have a right to ask them a question about where they are coming from.

It is not asking much. This is the highest court in the land but many times we would not know it. That side of the House prostrates themselves to the Prime Minister on most occasions, but I was so glad yesterday when finally members on that side realized that they had some power. All they have to do is exercise it.

All of us have constituents who are demanding that our system be democratic, that our institutions be democratic and that our institutions be responsive to the people. That is the meaning of democracy. I hear the Liberals telling us about the great and wonderful democracy in the country but they will not even think about debating or even allowing a vote on this. There is not much democracy in Canada. It is unfortunate.

• (1850)

We are a peaceful nation and we are a civilized nation. We have, in most cases, a Supreme Court that we respect and appreciate. However, at the same time there is no reason whatsoever to continue this process of one man, a Prime Minister, even though he talks to people behind the scenes, having the power to foist on this nation nine unelected people who think they are the last word on our society.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): 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.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 53(1), the House shall now resolve itself into committee of the whole for the purpose of considering Motion No. 6, under government business.

I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADIAN COAST GUARD

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 6, Mr. Kilger in the chair)

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That this Committee take note of the Canadian Coast Guard.

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I want to thank all parties for having agreed to have this debate on this significant item. It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House this evening and speak about a key Canadian institution and an important and highly respected cornerstone of my department, the Canadian Coast Guard. If it is permissible, I would like to point out the presence in the gallery of representatives from B. C.'s shipping and recreational boating industry who take particular interest in this debate.

As we know, this year the Canadian Coast Guard is celebrating its 40th anniversary as a national institution. The members of the Coast

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Guard, past and present, can be extremely proud of all they have accomplished over the years. They can also be extremely proud of the world class reputation they have earned through their hard work and dedication. In the years ahead the role of the Canadian Coast Guard will only become more important.

[*Translation*]

Canada has a long-standing relationship with our oceans and waterways. But over the decades, this historical reliance has translated into an economic necessity.

Today, in 2002, our oceans and waterways are busier than they have ever been—and getting busier every year.

Currently, over 70% of Canada's exports travel by ship—and nearly half our imports do. Some forecasts predict that international trade will triple by 2020, with over 90% of this trade moving by ship.

When we consider that marine transportation is one of the most environmentally friendly modes of transportation—particularly as we look for ways to meet our commitments under the Kyoto protocol—there is no way we can ignore the need to maintain a safe and efficient marine transportation highway.

• (1855)

[*English*]

Over the years the Canadian Coast Guard has proven it is up to the challenge of maintaining this highway. The Canadian Coast Guard provides services in a number of key areas: ensuring marine safety, including prevention and response; protecting the marine and freshwater environment; facilitating maritime commerce and sustainable development; supporting marine scientific excellence; working with fisheries officers to perform fisheries patrols; and supporting Canada's maritime priorities.

This broad mandate supported by a fleet of 104 vessels and 27 helicopters, a comprehensive technical support program and, most important, an extremely dedicated staff of thousands of women and men across the country.

Perhaps the most highly recognized Coast Guard function is in the area of maritime safety. The fleet currently operates 32 lifeboat stations equipped with specially designed and constructed search and rescue vessels, manned with specially trained crews at strategic locations across Canada.

In addition to the dedicated research and rescue vessels, other multi-tasked Canadian Coast Guard vessels are equipped and trained to perform search and rescue duties.

The volunteer based Canadian Coast Guard auxiliary is another key part of the Canadian Coast Guard safety services to Canadians. Its 5,000-plus members are dedicated to search and rescue and safe boating activities, and responded to over 2,000 search and rescue taskings last year, or 27% of all maritime search and rescue incidents across the country. These are impressive numbers.

The Canadian Coast Guard also has a role to play in safe navigation by marking dangerous passages and providing a range of aids to navigation to help vessels ply our waters.

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Ice breaking is another key function. The Canadian Coast Guard provides a range of services to help vessels through ice and ensure that commodities and other supplies get where they need to go safely and efficiently.

That brings me to the important economic dimensions of the Coast Guard's work. Every year billions of dollars worth of commodities travel in over 100,000 ship movements through Canadian waters. The Coast Guard's services help keep these commodities, and, by extension, our national economy, on the move.

However keeping vessels moving through Canada's waters requires a comprehensive communications system.

The Coast Guard's marine communications and traffic services program provides initial response to ships in distress, reduces the chances of ships being involved in collisions and groundings, and is a means by which important marine information, such as weather and navigation warnings, is disseminated.

It is a busy system. On an average day the system processes over 1,100 radio contacts and manages 2,200 ship movements. Every year, in fact, the Canadian Coast Guard assists thousands of vessels in distress, everything from commercial shipping and fishing to recreational boating.

In terms of responding to distress calls, the Coast Guard's rescue rate is 97%, one of the best in the world, and eight lives are saved on an average each day. The Canadian Coast Guard's importance does not get any clearer than that.

Incidentally, it was because of this valuable role that the Government of Canada announced in July 2000 that \$115 million over three years would be invested in Canada's search and rescue program, an investment that is providing new lifeboat stations and lifeboats. This complements the previously announced purchase of 15 Canadian Cormorant helicopters, an investment of \$780 million dedicated to search and rescue.

● (1900)

[*Translation*]

In addition to the Canadian Coast Guard's emergency-response capability, the organization also performs a lot of work on the prevention side of boating safety—including regulating the construction, inspection, equipment and operation of pleasure craft.

The Canadian Coast Guard also helps protect the marine environment. Through the Coast Guard's Environmental Response Program, the CCG prepares for, monitors, and ultimately prevents oil spills from happening.

The CCG also plays a role in responding to these incidents, working with certified response organizations to clean up spills.

As a key part of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Canadian Coast Guard plays an important role in fulfilling other areas of the department's mandate, too. For instance, 18 of the CGG's vessels are dedicated, specially designed science vessels. And Canadian Coast Guard vessels and aircraft provide a wide range of on-the-water support for the protection of fish and fish habitat. This includes monitoring activities, supporting our fishery officers, and other special operations.

[*English*]

The Canadian Coast Guard is uniquely positioned to help other federal departments, levels of governments and international organizations. For instance, the Canadian Coast Guard provides on the water support to a wide range of partners, including the RCMP, the Department of National Defence and many others.

Since the tragic incidents of 9/11, the Canadian Coast Guard has been working closely with Transport Canada and other agencies to deliver enhanced Canadian marine security. Indeed, through its presence, the Canadian Coast Guard helps fulfill Canada's expectations that the Government of Canada is maintaining a state of operational readiness.

One need only refer to incidents in recent years to see the important role that the Coast Guard played in responding to them: the Swissair 111 crash; the Ontario and Quebec ice storm; the floods in Manitoba and Quebec; the Air India crash; and, of course, Canada's response to 9/11. In all of these incidents, the Canadian Coast Guard was not only ready to answer the call, but it answered it in a fashion that all Canadians can be tremendously proud of.

In the words of Coast Guard Commissioner John Adams, "Our people are answering the bell".

However, as in any large, multifaceted organization, there are challenges to be faced. Funding, as always, is one such challenge. Our fleet capital requirements currently exceed the money available to us.

However we cannot let the challenges completely overshadow the fact that in recent years we have made some progress. The three year, \$115 million investment in search and rescue, which I mentioned earlier, is a good example.

While this is a step in the right direction, there clearly is still more to do. That is why fleet recapitalization will remain a high priority for me as minister and for my department to ensure this vital Canadian institution has what it need for the 21st century.

In the meantime, let me take this opportunity to assure all members of the House that the Canadian Coast Guard remains focused on the wide range of marine safety needs of Canadians.

Earlier I referred to the Coast Guard as a national institution. It is, but it is something more. It is not only a national institution, it is a national asset and, like any asset, it must be managed carefully, wisely and with an eye to the future.

As minister, I am here tonight to tell hon. members that I am committed to finding ways to strengthen this key Canadian asset in the future.

The Chairman of Committees of the Whole: Taking note of the number of members who want to ask questions, I will suggest, and I will have to enforce it for it to be successful, that each question be limited to one minute, and if the minister could respond in an equal amount of time of one minute, then we could go to a second round if applicable.

If that is agreeable to all parties, I will begin with the hon. member for Delta—South Richmond.

Government Orders

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Chairman, I find the minister's comments about the ability of the department to respond to incidents rather curious. He mentioned incidents like 9/11 and Swissair but failed to mention the most recent incident which occurred off the mouth of the Fraser River this past summer.

After that incident, the minister suggested that the Coast Guard divers were mistaken when they did not request permission to enter the overturned vessel. The fact of the matter is that they were directed not to. George Horel, the director of operational services, notes that if members had entered the overturned vessel it would have amounted to a violation of fleet safety procedures that would not be tolerated either now or later.

The minister suggested that the fleet safety regulations were somehow superceded by the Canada Labour Code. The Canada Labour Code does not empower divers to enter overturned vessels. In fact, it puts the onus on the rescue coordinator.

There is a huge discrepancy between the minister's comments and reality and I would like him to set the record straight this evening.

• (1905)

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Chairman, as I have indicated in the House before, I have had discussions with the responsible officer at search and rescue, Admiral MacLean, who indicated to me that he was quite aware of the procedures.

Our dive team operates under the Canada Labour Code. It is an open water dive team that does not do confined space diving.

Under the Canada Shipping Act, the commander has the authority to permit the divers to do anything reasonable to save human life, and I am paraphrasing here because I do not have the code in front of me. Under that act, if he had wished, if it had been requested and if the conditions had been right, he could have permitted the dive. He indicated to me that those conditions, in his humble opinion, did not exist.

We recognize weaknesses within the department, that those other procedures under the Canada Shipping Act were not part of our manual, and that there was a managerial communications problems that we are rectifying.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Chairman, I would like to tell the minister that, when we went west last year, we visited the Coast Guard and met the person in charge, who told us that "Everything is just fine, folks". But when we went to talk to the front-line people, they told us of huge problems and how, for instance, Chinese boats had been able to get up to the coast because there was no radar.

I also wonder to what extent the Coast Guard is really capable of doing the job. A ship, the *Ocean Venture* navigated the St. Lawrence up to the wharf at Rimouski. It was only when it got to Matane that people became aware of its existence and asked where it was headed. So it was in the gulf, and then in the estuary, and as far up as Matane before the authorities were aware of it. It was carrying salt, apparently, and stayed at that mooring for two years. We have just learned that it has been sold.

So how certain can we be that the Coast Guard can really do its job? I myself have serious doubts.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, the Coast Guard works, of course, in conjunction with all other federal government agencies, within its areas of responsibility, and with international agencies. It has some very modern equipment, particularly on the St. Lawrence.

If there was an incident—I am not aware of the one the hon. member has referred to and thank her for telling me—I will find out about it. There may be shortcomings, problematic incidents. I thank the member for telling me of them and I will check into it. We use such incidents to help us improve the system.

We do, however, wish to use the most up to date technology, the best adapted technologies, in order to have the best control humanly possible over our waters in order to protect Canadians. We work in conjunction with other agencies such as National Defence, the RCMP, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, and others.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chairman, while the minister is saying that Mr. Adams said that the Coast Guard would answer the bell, the difficulty is that the bell is not ringing. A lot of the ships in Halifax harbour cannot leave because there is no budget for fuel. The military is being asked more and more to do search and rescue. For the minister to tie the purchase of the Cormorants into the Coast Guard debate is intellectually dishonest and simply is not correct.

The Chairman of Committees of the Whole: I just want to caution members to be very judicious. When we start using that word, sometimes it leads us into an area we should do everything possible to avoid.

• (1910)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I will retract the last part of that.

My question for the minister is quite simple. The Minister of National Defence was quite right when he stated in his speech in Toronto that his department was short of resources. He stated publicly that he would go to the finance minister and his cabinet colleagues and ask for more resources for the men and women of the military.

I would like the minister to stand on his feet and state that the men and women of the Coast Guard will have his support in fighting for more resources through his cabinet colleagues prior to the next federal budget. Will he at least tell the men and women that he is prepared to fight for them to get additional resources so they can do the job that he so eloquently quoted here tonight?

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Chairman, I invite the member to read the transcript of the speech I just made. I indicated those points precisely.

My job as minister is to work with my colleagues in cabinet and in Parliament to get the resources necessary to protect the safety of Canadians and fulfil the mandate of the Canadian Coast Guard.

Government Orders

The member is wrong in saying that our boats cannot leave the harbour. We have the operational funds required for our boats and they are answering to all their tasks. We always use our money and resources efficiently and with the least waste possible to ensure we have those resources.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Chairman, I thank the minister for being here tonight to participate in the debate. Unless we can get our information from him and he can get the answers to all of us we will never solve the problem.

The minister remembers last year that when we talked about marine infrastructure the officials would say, "No, everything is great. Our wharves and everything are perfect". We then had hearings and people had to come and really discuss the problem openly. We were told that \$400 million was needed just to bring marine infrastructure up to par.

We are hearing now from the minister's own people that \$500 million is needed over the next few years to bring the Coast Guard up to par; \$350 million roughly to replace an aging fleet and provide proper coverage, and \$150 million or \$160 million to keep it going. I wonder if the minister thinks these figures are accurate.

Second, in relation to seniority, could the minister tell us the status of people working in the Coast Guard?

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Chairman, the second part of the question deals with labour management issues and questions pertaining to the contracts which I would not have any knowledge of. If he will send me a note, I am willing to look into the matter for him.

As far as the figures that were quoted which were presented by the commissioner before the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, I understand the commissioner was speaking of capital fund requirements, both as an initial capital fund and an ongoing capital fund requirement for the fleet. They did not deal with operations. The challenge is not with operational funding. It always has to be watched closely and we must keep working at it. The big challenge we have with such a large capital investment and the age of some of that equipment is on the capital side.

The commissioner outlined one plan and others will be looked at. The object at the end of the day is to provide the resources necessary for the men and women of the Coast Guard to provide the service for the people of Canada and internationally.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Chairman, the essence of leadership is clarity. People who are working for us in the field must understand the regulations.

The fleet safety manual is quite clear. Subsection 3.3(4) states that a public safety open water dive shall be: "restricted to open water situations". Subsection 3.3(6) states: "Limited to dives that avoid entrapment or entanglement situations and allow direct access to the surface". Then it states that "Penetration into capsized vessels, aircraft or submerged vehicles...is strictly prohibited".

Why does the Coast Guard go to the trouble of writing a fleet safety manual if it is to be superceded by the Canada Labour Code? I would like the minister to explain the contradiction.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Chairman, the Coast Guard dive team manual is not superceded by the Canada Labour Code. It is written to ensure that we meet the requirements of the Canada Labour Code. The Canada Shipping Act provisions come into play if the coordinator of search and rescue deems that the conditions are necessary. We recognize that the coordinator has that authority under the Canada Shipping Act.

I have said in the House and in many interviews that our managerial communications are weak and we are fixing that. However it is important that we set the record straight. Nobody has suggested that anything different would have been done or should have been done that day. Our Coast Guard response team personnel did a good job. I am quite proud of what they achieved that day. That was a tragic accident and we express our condolences to the families of the victims.

• (1915)

The Chairman of Committees of the Whole: Is there agreement?

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Chairman, there are a number of members who wish to speak. It would be better to let all members have their chance to speak.

The Chairman of Committees of the Whole: There is no agreement so we will resume debate. The hon. member for Delta—South Richmond.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Chairman, it is unfortunate that the minister will not allow himself to be cross-examined in the House. It would have made a marvellous contribution to the debate this evening.

Nevertheless, the fact is that there is a sorry state of affairs at the Canadian Coast Guard. Most of us who follow these issues are aware of the leadership and equipment deficiencies that have been visited upon our military and, indeed, in this instance visited upon our Coast Guard to no less an extent.

There is a huge lack of leadership that is troubling to the extreme. The lack of leadership is evident when there is a lack of clarity in the rules, when the people who are running the operation do not have the skills and marine rescue experience, but are merely armchair admirals. It does not make things easy for those people.

The other key issue, aside from leadership, is that budget cuts have undermined the Coast Guard and its ability to do the job. In 1996 the government spent \$542 million on the Coast Guard. In 2002 it spent \$440 million. That is a drop of over \$100 million over the last six years. That is simply inexcusable.

Government Orders

The Coast Guard infrastructure is badly strained and it has been recognized by many, including the Auditor General. The Auditor General noted in his report in 2000 the difficulties that were faced by those in the Coast Guard. He noted that the Coast Guard fleet in the last few years had dropped from 189 vessels to 104. He said that the first major challenge involved the need to replace aging vessels. The department estimated the effective life for ships was 30 years. The average age of its 41 large vessels was 22 years. The Auditor General noted that these vessels were fast approaching the end of their useful life, at a time when funds for capital projects were not plentiful. According to the department's own 1999 estimate, the cost of replacing all large vessels amounted to \$2.2 billion.

Mr. Adams, a coast guard commissioner, told the committee that based on a renewal of the asset base of 4%, the Canadian Coast Guard should be investing between \$140 million and \$150 million a year in capital funding. He further noted that the need for action was urgent and well recognized.

There are two issues that clearly bring into focus the funding and leadership problems at the Coast Guard. First, the tragic overturning and sinking of the *Cap Rouge II* this past summer in the entrance to the Fraser River; and, second, the failure of the Coast Guard to provide the essential hovercraft coverage that is required by Vancouver airport.

Nothing speaks as clearly of the rot that has so devastated the Coast Guard as the failed rescue attempts or the inability of the Coast Guard to adequately perform its function on that tragic day of August 13. The Coast Guard divers were on the scene in 18 minutes. The difficulty was that when they arrived there they lacked the air supply equipment that had been disposed of when the dive team was disbanded in 2001.

The House will recall that an executive decision was made back in 2001 to dispose of the dive team. Within days of the disbanding of that dive team the Coast Guard got rid of the surface to air facility that the dive team had. It was gone. When the dive team was reconstituted they were missing that vital piece of equipment. They were unable to effect the rescue or to even penetrate the hull safely on that particular day. If they had been able to get into the overturned hull of the *Cap Rouge II* with their limited air supply it easily could have cost them their lives.

● (1920)

When questions were asked as to why the divers had not attempted a rescue, the leaders in the Coast Guard, these bureaucrats, ghoulishly suggested that the divers could have entered the *Cap Rouge II* if only they had known the rules, the rules that we were talking about only moments ago. That is shameful because no diver should have to sacrifice his life for the incompetence of the Coast Guard commissioner and his underlings, yet that is the issue that was here that particular day. Those same leaders know that if divers had attempted that dive without enough air to return to the surface, they could very well have been on a suicide mission. There is no question about that.

When the team arrived on site they were not able to use the latest hovercraft that was available. They were forced to go out in the old CG-045 which was retired this past October 4. When it arrived on the scene it was unable to stay very long because the team had some

mechanical difficulties with it. They were concerned about its stability and it had to return to base.

Things are not well in the Coast Guard. In the *Cap Rouge II* report that was written after the capsizing, Rear Admiral Fraser had some interesting words. He pointed out that there ought not to be a blanket prohibition on rescue dives as presently found in the fleet safety manual. He said the decision to enter an overturned vessel cannot be legislated in advance by regulations. That in fact is the case.

The second issue, which reflects poorly on the Coast Guard and shows the underlying problem here and the lack of resources, is the failure of the government to replace in a timely fashion the hovercraft, which retired this past October 4. The Vancouver International Airport Authority emergency plan requires the availability of two hovercraft in the unlikely event a large passenger liner puts down in the tidal flats as it approaches Vancouver airport. Currently there is one hovercraft available. That hovercraft obviously has to be pulled out of service for routine maintenance and so on. When it is out of service there is nothing there to provide backup.

Just last spring, when there were two hovercraft available, the Coast Guard based at Sea Island had to go out of service for a time and had to advise the Rescue Coordination Centre in Victoria and the Vancouver airport that it was going out of service because both of the hovercraft that should have been available were not, and even the rigid hull inflatables at the station were not available. Vancouver airport was advised that it should contact a commercial helicopter operation so that helicopters could provide the necessary rescue service in the event it was needed.

A commercial helicopter is not an adequate substitute for a hovercraft in these instances. The extreme weather conditions that can be met off the end of the runways in Vancouver on those tidal flats and the water conditions all require the availability of a hovercraft. A helicopter simply cannot do the job. It cannot deliver the rescue platforms to a downed aircraft. It cannot be done.

The two issues that underscore the underfunding of the Coast Guard strike very close to home for us on the west coast. The response to the *Cap Rouge II* was feeble. It was not feeble because of the people of the Coast Guard. They performed an admirable job, as the minister stated so clearly, but the problem was that they were not provided with the equipment they needed. They did not have the equipment. The Coast Guard gave away the equipment they needed to do that job when it disbanded the dive team and it refused to resupply the team with the necessary equipment. That issue in a sense has passed. We want to see it corrected.

● (1925)

The real danger right now is the failure of the government to provide adequate hovercraft coverage off Vancouver airport. I cannot underscore too much how irresponsible that is of the government. It is beyond belief. It is an issue that has to be addressed.

Government Orders

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I will not bother with the issue of the dive team. I do not think the information he is presenting is 100% accurate and in many instances it would be misleading. I will not debate that any further. However I thank the member for his genuine interest in these matters.

Does the member not recognize that on the question of the Vancouver Airport Authority and its emergency measures response plan, would it not recognize that our hovercrafts are primarily search and rescue and could be on mission at any time? Would it not be true, as it is my understanding, that the airport's emergency response plan would foresee that? Would it also not be true that not very long ago there was one hovercraft? Now we have a modern one, a bigger, a brand new high tech one, and a second one coming in. We are doing the plans to bring in another one like the CG we have now.

Mr. John Cummins: Mr. Chairman, I find the question rather curious because the minister asked whether the Vancouver airport recognizes that the hovercraft could be dispatched on another search and rescue mission. Yes, that is a possibility, but a downed aircraft is a rescue mission and it requires a hovercraft to be there. In fact the Vancouver airport plan calls for two in the event that a large passenger liner ditches in the tidal flats, not one, but two.

Currently, with only one hovercraft available, there are periods of time when there is no protection whatsoever. If there were two, it is hoped that they would be able to cover off.

We cannot forget that the only vessel capable of performing a rescue operation in the tidal flats off the end of the Vancouver airport runway is a hovercraft. That is the only kind. A deep keel vessel cannot go in there. Even rigid hull inflatables cannot operate there in all weather conditions. The only vessel that is appropriate for use in those tidal flats is a hovercraft.

It is not the responsibility of the Vancouver airport, it is the responsibility of the Coast Guard. It is that agency's primary responsibility. That agency is responsible for providing those sorts of rescue operations on the high seas.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chairman, I thank my hon. colleague from the Alliance for his comments.

The member knows that at one of our committee hearings we had in Vancouver with Coast Guard management, when I asked one of the gentlemen, Mr. Mike Henderson, directly what the financial situation was of the Coast Guard and DFO on the west coast, he clearly said "Money is not a problem".

We went out to all the regions, Tofino, Ucluelet, and all those other areas. Every single one of the managers and the people there said that money was so tight that one woman worked every day in August. They did not have enough people for the training. There were serious financial concerns. The manager in Vancouver said that money was not a problem and in his jurisdiction every one of his people said it was the number one problem.

My hon. colleague was there at that time and I would like him to comment on that.

• (1930)

Mr. John Cummins: Mr. Chairman, my friend is quite correct. The head of the Coast Guard on the west coast was clearly asked if money was a problem. He said it was no problem at all.

A picture comes to my mind when I think about the shortfall of funding in the Coast Guard. The committee travelled to Prince Rupert. We have all seen second world war movies where the progress of convoys was plotted across the north Atlantic. There was a big table with a chart on it and little ships were moved across the table. When we were in Prince Rupert they were plotting the position of ships entering Prince Rupert harbour on a table. It took me back to World War II.

This is the computer age. It boggles the mind that we have to rely on moving little wooden boats across a table to show us where ships are. What good is that in foggy conditions when two ships are on a collision course and someone has to notify them of their problems given that there may be communications problems or radar problems with those vessels? What good is it? It just defies description.

The Coast Guard is sadly underfunded. There is no question about that. It is scandalous that the Coast Guard was unable to provide a continuous air supply to its divers. It is scandalous that it was unable to provide adequate hovercraft coverage for Vancouver airport.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Chairman, following up on the question from my colleague on my right who is ordinarily on my left, I also attended many of the committee meetings on the west coast. I wonder if my colleague from the Alliance would comment on two different aspects of the information we received.

We were told that funding was so short that regular maintenance was no longer being done at the remote radar sites. The only time a site was serviced was when it went down. These sites are remote. Consequently, when they went down, accessibility was always a problem, especially in winter and during bad weather. When they got to the site, if they did not have the right parts to fix whatever was wrong, quite often a second or third trip had to take place. If it became dark, they had to get out of there before the work was finished and the situation was further aggravated.

We heard horror stories of what happened in the interim, including a fisherman who got a jigger in his eye and there was no way of hooking up to a hospital to receive guidance as to what to do.

The committee also visited the coast guard set-up in Seattle just across the border. I wonder if the member would compare what he saw in Seattle with what we saw along the Pacific coast in British Columbia specifically.

Mr. John Cummins: Mr. Chairman, there is no question that the budget cuts have hurt. The instances my friend has advised the House of are true.

The Union of Canadian Transportation Employees has compiled a list of issues and occurrences where lack of funding could have actually caused harm to employees. One of the documents talked about one employee who was working on a radio tower at Inuvik. He took a coffee break and while he was on the coffee break, the darn thing fell down. It is incredible.

If we compare what was happening with the Canadian Coast Guard with the coast guard in Seattle, it is like night and day. The head man for the American coast guard addressed our committee in Seattle. He was probably one of the most impressive people that I have met in my lifetime. He was not a huge man, but by his very presence he filled the room. I know that all my colleagues were absolutely taken by the marvellous knowledge that Admiral Brown had and his command of the issues.

We met with the head of the Canadian Coast Guard in Vancouver. He has a Ph.D. in biology. I am sure he is a very nice man. I am sure his wife and kids love him. I am sure he is a fine biologist, but I will say that his knowledge of marine rescue issues and Coast Guard issues is sadly lacking.

It is a sad commentary on the bureaucracy that the government has put in place to provide rescue services for Canadians.

• (1935)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Chairman, I listened to hon. members talk about the coast guard and about what, in my view, is the main problem, namely underfunding. I want to say from the outset that four major principles should apply when it comes to the Canadian Coast Guard.

The first principle is that the Canadian Coast Guard should be able to fulfill its role and duties as they relate to the needs of the marine industry, the fishery and the public. This is a basic principle which, I think, is not respected at present, because, in my opinion, the coast guard does not have the means to fulfill such a broad mandate.

The second principle is that the coast guard should have the necessary means to fulfill the multiple and complex tasks that it faces. Among other things, there is a whole set of tasks that the coast guard must do and that I will mention later on. These are tasks that very few people know about and that the general public is probably not aware of.

The third principle is that the coast guard must serve as a tool to maintain and develop the shipping industry, and not as a collector of funds, which is what it has become since 1998, with the introduction of icebreaking fees, among other things.

The fourth principle is that not only should coast guard services be effective, they should not be provided on a cost sharing basis with the marine industry or with any of the users.

I should point out that, at present, the shipping industry is the only one that pays for coast guard services. Boaters do not pay for these services.

However, the main problem for the coast guard is undoubtedly underfunding. The coast guard was established in 1962, under the government of the Right Hon. John Diefenbaker. It was the hon. Léon Balcer who, at the time, created the Canadian Coast Guard. The coast guard functioned well, with the means that it had at the time, until 1995, when it was transferred from Transport Canada to Fisheries and Oceans Canada, at the time when the Department of Transport became more of a regulatory body than a department with real duties.

Government Orders

Following the December 2000 report of the Auditor General, some measures were taken by the department, but were they sufficient? The Auditor General said in his report, and I quote:

The Department has not established clear, concrete, realistic and agreed-upon performance expectations for the fleet.

Has this situation been rectified today? I do not think so. We spoke about this earlier, we could provide the figures on the aging fleet. Today, it would cost \$2.2 billion to replace the Canadian Coast Guard's vessels that are—or will become in the coming years—completely obsolete and unusable by the Coast Guard. We are talking about \$2.2 billion. I do not believe the government has the will to invest that kind of money just to replace the CCG fleet, which is in the process of becoming completely obsolete.

According to the Auditor General, there is only a one-year funding horizon for the fleet, when what we should really be doing is maintaining the fleet in good repair, as homeowners do, and replacing vessels as they needed. Instead, today we are faced with an enormous expense because we did not really maintain the fleet in the past. We were too shortsighted to invest over time and replace the fleet gradually. I am talking about the fleet, but I could also talk about the equipment. The same is true for all of the Coast Guard equipment.

Earlier, members spoke of the hovercraft issue. In British Columbia, there is one that is grounded, unusable, that the government is trying to replace right now.

• (1940)

Another point was raised by the Auditor General: the internal budget process does not promote accountability for fleet activities. More specifically, this means plainly and simply that the Auditor General felt the internal management of the coast guard was not great.

Coming back to statements regarding the problem with the coast guard, let us see what coast guard commissioner John Adams said in May 2002. One must read between the lines. He said that the commissioner was concerned about the post-September 11 security challenge.

It is true that the government woke up following September 11. It realized that the coast guard was terribly lacking in equipment and, as colleagues mentioned earlier, there were huge areas, particularly on the west coast, where it was practically impossible to detect ships approaching the shore and, by the time they were detected, it was really too late.

The commissioner also raised the issue of marine service fees and the scrutiny of tariff agreements. He added that appropriate fees must be restored so that everyone benefits. For the industry, he agreed that an increase would be unacceptable. Negotiations are underway, and the marine service fee agreement is expiring in December. The agreement in place since 1998 is expiring in December.

Government Orders

Is the department prepared to respond positively to the industry's requests and its recent proposal? Is it prepared to continue negotiating with the industry to ensure that these fees are at least reduced, particularly with respect to the St. Lawrence River. The industry contends—naturally, this needs to be checked—that because of globalization, marine transportation is increasing worldwide. Only on the St. Lawrence River and the Seaway is traffic tonnage declining.

This comes as quite a surprise given that in U.S. harbours, in Boston, New York and elsewhere, and even in harbours on the east and west coasts of Canada, marine traffic is increasing. Yet, it is declining on the St. Lawrence River.

The reason is a very simple one. When you have to pay \$3,700 in fees every time you enter or berth at a port, well then you will go to one a bit further along, or you will ship by train or truck. You will not use ports where there is a \$3,700 fee. That is what the Canadian Coast Guard is currently charging at the St. Lawrence ports between December 21 and the beginning of May every year. Obviously this reduces ship traffic on the St. Lawrence and has a considerable negative impact on the ports along the St. Lawrence, whether Montreal, Quebec or elsewhere. Then they are surprised that ship traffic is decreasing on the St. Lawrence.

Returning to a remark by the commissioner, and one has to know how to read between the lines, the commissioner said that negotiation is currently under way and this problem needs to be solved. He also says that any increase in fees would be totally unacceptable to the industry. That is what the commissioner said.

It is worth pointing out, however, that the commissioner is not totally in agreement, in my opinion, with the Coast Guard being turned into a government tax collector. That is, basically, what we have made it into.

The commissioner mentioned another challenge: the financial issue. He said that there was too much disparity between the budgets allocated to the coast guard and the tasks it is assigned. That is what we keep hearing, that insufficient funding is provided to the coast guard. It is asked to carry out tasks, but not provided with sufficient equipment. And this has been going on for years.

Today, the people opposite seem surprised that there are problems with the coast guard. Following September 11, they woke up and figured they ought to do something about it. They did invest in the coast guard recently, but this money should have been flowing its way over the years, so that today we would have an efficient coast guard capable of fulfilling its mission and all the tasks it was designed for, as well as providing services to all of the industry, including fisheries and transport, and to the public in general.

I will close by saying that for years, the government did not provide the coast guard with the means to fulfil its mission. As a member of the Bloc Québécois and my party's critic for fisheries and oceans, I urge this government to make an effort and provide the coast guard with what it needs to fulfil its mandates.

• (1945)

Mr. Georges Farrah (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's

comments. When one listens to opposition members, ones wonders if the coast guard does anything good in this country.

It is perfectly legitimate to show the concrete and effective action of the coast guard across Canada. Having said this, the issue of funding can indeed be raised. Every organization and department may need funding. However, it is important to note that the coast guard, along with its partners, saves some 3,900 lives in Canada, including 1,500 in British Columbia alone.

It should also be noted that, in the area of environmental protection, the coast guard has, along with the industry, followed up on 1,594 marine pollution incidents in 2001. As regards pleasure craft, the number of fatal accidents in Canadian waters has diminished drastically since 1991. This is partly because of the work of the coast guard and because of all the public awareness campaigns to encourage responsible boating.

I am asking the hon. member if he sees positive things about the coast guard, or if he thinks that all coast guard employees are incompetent. The hon. member could not give us an example. When we look at the global picture in terms of achievements, we see that the coast guard is effective and this should be pointed out.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Mr. Chairman, in no way did I criticize Coast Guard staff. I did not criticize Coast Guard employees in any way. What I said, and what I asked for, was that it be given the funding required to provide the services, to have acceptable equipment available and to be able to work in reasonable conditions, which is not the case in many areas.

Take the example of the fleet. With an obsolete fleet—the average age of the large vessels is 22 years—that has never, or virtually never, been repaired, it is fair to wonder about the equipment these people have at their disposal to provide services.

Obviously, a few vessels have been added over the years, but very few. Ask these people what kind of equipment they have. Go to the east coast or west coast and see the conditions in which these people are working.

We toured coast guard facilities, particularly those in the Maritimes and in eastern Quebec. They had just received laptop computers. They had computers, but they were virtually non functional for years. It is as simple as that.

However, I remind my colleague that if we compare the Canadian Coast Guard to the American Coast Guard, the contrast is stark. Yet, Canada and Quebec together have the longest coastline in the world. Our coast guard should be bigger than the American Coast Guard. However, this is not the case. Far from it.

Government Orders

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask a question of my friend from the Bloc Québécois. The Liberal member told us that everything is fine and that the coast guard has enough money. This is not the case in Newfoundland. Is this true for Quebec?

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Mr. Chairman, we also visited the facilities in Newfoundland, as well as in Quebec and the maritime provinces. The situation is the same in Newfoundland. Things are the same there because there has been no funding in past years, except perhaps just recently.

Since 1993 or so, the coast guard has seen its budget slashed quite drastically. Its budget has gone down, not up. As well, it has been asked to become a tax collector for the government.

Could we find out what the situation is in other countries. Does the U.S. Coast Guard collect fees for instance? Absolutely not. It reports to the U.S. Army and has a sizeable budget, compared to here.

In my opinion, the Canadian Coast Guard is a totally forgotten institution, one that has been totally destroyed since 1993, and has received nothing. Budgets have just started to go up again very recently, but that is probably the result of September 11 and the wake-up call we got from that .

• (1950)

Mr. André Harvey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I always appreciate comments from my opposition colleagues. I would like to try to clarify things for the Bloc Québécois members, in particular the member who just spoke. If there were not already such a thing as negativity, the Bloc Québécois members would have invented it. Allow me to illustrate this quickly.

They make all sorts of demands: wharf repairs, highway construction and tonight they are calling for more money for the Coast Guard. I ask them, with all the humility I can muster, if they might not be a bit more consistent when, for example, the government comes up with tools to carry out major infrastructure projects.

This was the case a few weeks ago. Bill C-49 created a program specifically for strategic infrastructure projects. Nothing is more strategic than highways, wharves and major projects.

They voted against the bill. It was not even a general budget, where it is always possible to find some grounds for voting against it. They voted against a strategic infrastructure program. Can the members of the Bloc Québécois, who, incidentally, campaign against me year round—which I quite like, I quite like them during election campaigns, and they will be in the riding of Lac-Saint-Jean—tell me why they voted against these specific measures? Then, they come to the House asking for money. When we carry out projects, they say, “it is thanks to us”.

Let me give another example. I know that you are very tolerant, Mr. Chairman. It is nice this evening—

The Chairman of Committees of the Whole: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired. The hon. member for Matapédia—Matane.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Mr. Chairman, I know my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and his sense of humour well. But had he caught the first minutes of my remarks, had he listened carefully, he would have realized that I was extremely positive about the Coast Guard.

I will say the same thing to my hon. colleague from Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok. What I am asking is for the Coast Guard to be provided with the means to act, to become a real institution and stop being mistreated. That is clear. That is what I am asking for.

Let it be a real institution, capable of providing services, and not a tool to collect taxes, as has been the case in recent years, since 1998. That is not its role. Its role is to provide services.

Let us stop relying on the Coast Guard to collect fees in an effort to make up for shortfalls in budgets. Let us give it what it needs to provide services to the public. Otherwise, what is the point of creating an institution and not being able to support it? It is pointless. The Coast Guard needs to be supported. It seems clear to me.

[*English*]

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Chairman, I want to compliment my friend from the Bloc not just on his speech this evening, but also on his work and that of his colleagues on the committee over the years. They have made a valuable contribution to the proceedings. Any fair reading of committee minutes will show that their contribution has been second to none, including when the committee was sitting on the west coast of Canada. I have, and I know my friends on the west coast have, very much appreciated the interest the Bloc members have taken regarding our difficulties. I have nothing but admiration for their contribution to the committee.

I believe it was in 1995 that the Coast Guard merged with DFO. That has caused considerable consternation on the west coast. There was a merging of resources.

The end result of that merging was that some vessels do not have adequately trained rescue specialists aboard. Others are tied up while they are supposed to be offshore on search and rescue status. Coast Guard vessels get seconded to do fisheries work when they should be elsewhere. It has created havoc, I think is probably the best word, and at times difficulty for crew members.

I would like to ask my friend if the same sort of difficulties have been experienced in the Quebec region.

• (1955)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Mr. Chairman, I will answer my hon. colleague very briefly. When the Canadian Coast Guard and Fisheries and Oceans Canada merged in 1995, we experienced the same kind of problems as those experienced in the west.

Government Orders

There was disenchantment within the Coast Guard. People felt somewhat abandoned. There used to be a sort of division. I must say that the Coast Guard was a bit like a large family at the time. When they combined it with Fisheries and Oceans, they displaced the family, which resulted in problems with the internal workings of the Coast Guard, on both the east and the west coast.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chairman, I wish to thank the hon. government House leader for allowing the debate to take place this evening. It is a debate we do not have very often in the House, in central Canada. The debate is about the serious issue of the Coast Guard which more or less affects the three oceans we have. Many people fail to remember that the Coast Guard is also very effective in the Great Lakes region, Lake Winnipeg and in the Arctic. I wish to thank all members for participating in this debate.

Hopefully through this debate and dialogue we can give support to the minister when he goes to cabinet asking for more resources, because we hope that is what he will be doing. We assume that is what he said in his speech tonight although he did not come out as clear as the Minister of National Defence. We are hoping indeed that he will be doing that.

If we listen to the minister's speech he makes it sound like everything is just great and wonderful. In fact, why are we even having a debate tonight? We should go home, have dinner and be with our families, but the reality is that there are serious concerns within the Coast Guard.

Mr. Mike Wing, the head of the Union of Canadian Transportation Employees, Mr. John Fox from Nova Scotia representing the regions, Senator Pat Carney, Senator Mike Forrestall and many members of Parliament would not be holding press conferences and addressing the serious issues of the Coast Guard if everything was just fine. The fact is that it is the absolute opposite. Not only the men and women of the Coast Guard, but coastal communities across and within the country as well as many shippers in cities along the St. Lawrence, for example, have raised serious issues about the Coast Guard, its fee structure and how it collects its fees, as my hon. friend from the Bloc mentioned.

It is not only the opposition who has noticed the deficiencies within the Coast Guard. The member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac is the son of a former fisheries minister. We were in Prince Edward Island and saw countless numbers of buoys on the ground. They should have been in the water doing the job of a nav-aid, but they were on the ground. The hon. member from the Liberal Party asked what they were doing there. The officials said they simply did not have the budget to take them out. They went on to elaborate that approximately \$150,000 worth of nav-aids were lost due to the ice the previous year because they did not have the budget to go out and bring them in. They were just lost. They get damaged and they are gone. That \$150,000 is just what we know of from one little visit by the committee to Prince Edward Island.

We were in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. My colleagues behind me will know this very well as will the Liberals. We were there meeting with Coast Guard officials. The coastline of Newfoundland and Labrador is very large. There is lots of oil and

gas activity, commercial activity for fishing, and lots of recreation fishing, et cetera. We asked them how many Coast Guard vessels were patrolling the waters of Newfoundland and Labrador at that moment. The reply was that they had one. It was sitting in the harbour. I am not making this up. That came from one of the managers of the Coast Guard in DFO in Newfoundland and Labrador. They had one vessel.

Why do we have thousands of shore birds and sea birds washed up on the shores of Newfoundland and Labrador because of oil spills? Why do we have illegal fishing off our coastlines? Why do we have illegal immigrants coming into the country? Why do we have drugs coming into the country? We are simply not doing the job. The Coast Guard, because of lack of resources and clear direction by the government, is not able to do the job it wants to do.

One would assume that post-9/11 we would have beefed up security, but the reality is that we have lessened security. It is unacceptable that has happened.

Mr. Mike Wing, the head of the union, would not be standing in the House, or anywhere else for that matter, mentioning the serious concerns of morale among the men and women he represents if he did not have facts and clear arguments for his case. This is what is happening. Morale in the Coast Guard is at an all-time low.

Those who talked to Coast Guard officials and DFO officials when the merger took place in 1995 know of the internal battle between the Coast Guard and DFO officials. In many cases that battle still continues as they fight for their share of the pie.

• (2000)

Moving the Coast Guard to DFO sounded fairly good in theory. They both did the same sort of work so maybe it might have worked. When Senator Pat Carney, Senator Mike Forrestall, and the union asked for an inquiry into the Coast Guard, one of the biggest questions they wanted to ask was: How is that merger working? In their opinion it had failed. It was simply not effective.

When I first became fisheries and oceans critic for the NDP a Coast Guard official, the acting director at the time, came to our committee. My colleague from the Alliance was there. I asked him questions about funding. I did not ask him about this in particular but he came out and said that \$200 million of the Coast Guard budget was diverted into the regular DFO budget for other purposes.

We know that with downsizing in 1995 a lot of money was cut from the Coast Guard. The minister said we put so much back in. We have not put back what we have taken out already.

We understand there are other spending requirements for the government. We know we need to be fiscally accountable and responsible for taxpayer dollars. An investment in the Coast Guard is an investment in our country. That is a fact. The men and women of the Coast Guard are willing to risk their lives for the protection of our interests. They are willing to go into certain conditions out on the ocean at the worst time of year that you and I would not even dream of, Mr. Speaker. They are proud and they want to do their job. What is most important is that they have the confidence and the support of not only the fisheries minister but the government as well, and for that matter all members of Parliament, that what they do is valuable and important.

Government Orders

One of the most telling things about what was going on in the Coast Guard and how the right hand did not know what the left hand was doing was when we were in Vancouver. I asked Mr. Mike Henderson of the Coast Guard: "How is it going with the resources? How is the money? Is there any problem with money?" He said, "Money is not a problem". We had to take the man for his word. We were not going to accuse him of something until we got the facts. Then we went to the regions. We went to Victoria, Ucluelet and Tofino. It was a completely different story.

Those who know Vancouver and Victoria know that it is not that far apart. There are phones and, with technology, e-mail. We would assume that the head of the Coast Guard on the west coast would know what the heck is going on in his department. Every single person on the west coast said money was the number one problem. I ask the minister, how can your official, who—

The Chairman of Committees of the Whole: I wish to remind members to direct all their interventions through the Chair please.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Chairman, through you to the minister, how can one official there, in a senior position, be so ignorant of what is going on in his region? That is just one person we spoke to. We do not have the taxpayer dollars to go to every single person in the Coast Guard across the country to ask these questions but that was just one. If that is an indication of the management of the Coast Guard and reflects what is going on in that region, then we are in serious trouble.

We ask now, and I support the call for the inquiry, to ensure that the government has a clear understanding of what is going on in this valuable department in the country.

Nobody on this side, and I suspect nobody on that side, is condemning the work that the men and women of our Coast Guard do. We are proud of our men and women of the Coast Guard. As the minister said, they are ready to answer the bell. The fact is the bell is not ringing because they simply do not have the resources to do the job that we ask them to do. That is a serious problem.

We can go on all night on this debate. The reality is that *Cap Rouge II* was a serious incident. We have serious questions to ask about that. We will never know if somebody could have been saved. There were warnings. Just a while before that happened a person ran off a bridge in his car and there was no dive team to respond. There were warnings that something of this nature could happen and Coast Guard officials refused to respond in the proper manner.

• (2005)

We are asking the minister to go to cabinet and say that he has the support of the opposition as well as the support of Canadians to ask for more resources and a clear direction for the future of the men and women of our Coast Guard.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Chairman, I thank my colleague from Nova Scotia for his spirited and passionate debate.

Clearly there is a serious problem with respect to the lack of resources and staffing cutbacks that have been made to the Coast Guard. The member is right to point out that it is not a lack of effort

and commitment on its part. In fact, the Coast Guard is performing admirably in spite of the situation that it has been placed in.

I want to key in on one area that should not be ignored in this debate and that is the situation with navigational aids. My colleagues from Nova Scotia and St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador are painfully aware of this from having had discussions with Coast Guard officials and others.

Since 1996 and even before, the presence of marine navigational aids have dropped significantly and dramatically. The government will have to reinvest in that critical area. Putting lights and buoys on the coast goes back to the very beginnings of this country. We must ensure that those beacons of light are available for basic safety reasons for those who find themselves in peril at sea.

There are lighthouses that have been completely taken down and are no longer manned. That situation has exacerbated the shortages that already exist in terms of personnel who are available on the water, but this is now an increased danger. With the exception perhaps of Prince Edward Island, manned lighthouses in the maritime region have dramatically fallen.

There are private groups such as Keepers of the Beacon in Guysborough County who are desperately trying to attract the attention of DFO and the minister to this situation. In some instances they are looking to privatize the navigational aids for both heritage and practical purposes.

I would like to hear what the member thinks could be done in terms of improving the presence of these buoys and lighthouses. I have been made aware of instances where lights and buoys are currently in place but are insufficient. They do not work, they are not certified, and they are not up to par. We also have the situation where many lighthouses are being taken down and efforts are being made to re-establish, and in some cases at a private sector level, this important infrastructure.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Chairman, I thank my hon. colleague from Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough for his intervention.

He is absolutely right. It would be remiss for any of us to ignore the concerns and also the valuable work that the Coast Guard Auxiliary does across the country. These are volunteers who have in many ways picked up the slack from the lack of government attention.

The lighthouse keepers and many groups in Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, British Columbia and other places have spent thousands of hours trying to get the attention of the government to say that these lighthouses are of historical value. They are not just nice and pretty for tourists to look at, but they also have a function and a role to play. We cannot rely on GPS alone. We must have these lights out there. I for one have always opposed the destaffing of lighthouses.

I also oppose alternate service delivery. The Coast Guard or DFO does not have the resources or personnel to ensure that private companies are doing the job they say they are going to do. A lot of the nav-aids and buoys disappear when the ice comes in. They are gone.

Government Orders

This is a waste of taxpayers' money. Taxpayers pay money for those buoys. DFO or the Coast Guard just says that they did not get it this year. There is some more money gone. It is simply unacceptable.

• (2010)

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I thank the member for his comments, especially his fine comments about the Coast Guard Auxiliary which has its own maintenance costs with little assistance from the federal government. The government gives them some \$5 million a year. I agree that it provides an invaluable service.

I understand that the member would not agree with destaffing lighthouses. I imagine if he were here in 1890 he would not have supported abandoning the stagecoach and we would still have it. We must modernize some points and he is right on some of them. We are using modern aids and modernization. I appreciate the points he made about marine service fees and I share those elements, but we have additional cost requests. We have cost needs and cost recovery.

I believe the member would agree that we should discuss some partnership arrangements with marine shippers, partly because they would like to see a reduction, and prefer an elimination, of marine service fees. They also recognize and work with us so that we become more efficient.

Would it be objectionable to the member to have third party arrangements or private sector partnerships with marine navigational aids or other structures to achieve those goals that we all want?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Chairman, I for one have never objected to working with outside partners in order to achieve efficiencies within a particular department, but if those efficiencies mean one is going to lose \$150,000 or \$170,000 worth of equipment on a yearly basis, then I question the efficiency of that. I come from the Halifax area where they are always concerned about the threat of ice-breaking charges and fees for an ice-free port. These are some the things that we have to raise.

He talked about the stagecoach revival. Well, it has been proven that manning those lighthouses is just as cost effective as if they are allowed to die down with all the environmental concerns and the fact that someone has to be sent out to repair the lights, if we bother to do that at all. The neglect is incredible. It is almost to the point that working in a lighthouse is thought to be a passé job and it should not have to be there, but I beg to differ.

In many areas of the country, those eyes and the physical presence of a human being could be saving lives when mariners are in trouble. Automatic light stations cannot do that. Having a human there could very well save people's lives. We simply do not know. If they are not manned we will not know if they are able to save lives. However, if somebody is there to survey the waters and check everything out and has knowledge of the local area, that could indeed save lives. If we are using the precautionary concern, why not?

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, my friend has raised a very good point which has been raised by others as well. It has to do with the marine navigation services program. In the public accounts committee report, Mr. Adams, the Coast Guard commissioner, admitted:

We don't always get the buoys out of the water as soon as we would like before the ice comes in, and we don't always get them back in the water as soon as we'd like to when the ice goes out...some compromises are made as a result of the lack of funding.

That was said by the Coast Guard commissioner. I do not think the hon. member for Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore could have said it any more clearly than that. He may want to comment on that.

There is another issue on which I would like him to comment. I appreciated his remarks about the Coast Guard auxiliary. It does a marvellous and outstanding job. There are a couple of auxiliaries that operate in my constituency and I am very much aware of what they do.

However, with these funding cuts to the department, there is a fear that the government may be trying to replace the regular Coast Guard employees with the volunteers in the Coast Guard auxiliary. It is clear in my mind that there is not really a duplication of services. One complements the other. However, if they are trying to accomplish replacing the fine work that the regular force does, there may be some problems. I wonder if my friend has some thoughts on that.

• (2015)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Chairman, my hon. colleague from the Canadian Alliance is the official DFO critic for his party. I must say that he brings a wealth of knowledge as a commercial fisherman in the past to the Coast Guard and DFO debate. I thank him and members of his party very much for the continuous work they do in committee.

He mentioned what Mr. Adams said. I did not say that; Mr. Adams said that. If the minister is not willing to listen to us, is he willing to listen to his own commissioner? The fact is there is a sneaking suspicion not only within the union but with many other people that DFO eventually would like to eliminate the full time and regular employees of the Coast Guard and replace them with the volunteers. That is the suspicion. I cannot say that is actually happening, but it leads one to believe that may be the final objective.

In looking at the serious funding cuts, the lack of attention to detail in the Coast Guard, will it just let it go and let the volunteer sector pick it up? That may very well happen. We hope it will not and we will fight against it. We believe, as the hon. member said, that the full time Coast Guard and the auxiliary complement one another and have a very good working relationship.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Chairman, it is certainly a pleasure to speak to the resolution that is before us. We are not the first ones to kick it off. A few days ago the other house through Senator Carney raised the issue publicly in a press statement which was followed up by a news conference. It was a news conference participated in by many of my colleagues here and is one which drew attention from the Coast Guard.

Government Orders

The commissioner was not very happy with some of the stuff we said. It was interesting after he had done his presentation on the radio. The people who actually work in the Coast Guard, are hardworking people whom the minister said he is so proud of. We are all very proud of the workers in the Coast Guard because they are the ones on the front line. They are very seldom called out when everything is going well. They are called out to do their jobs when things go wrong, when the weather is bad, when there is danger. Many of them always put their lives on the line.

When we talk about the example in British Columbia, the people who were not rescued, it was not because the Coast Guard people were afraid. They go out there as firefighters and policemen. They know what is ahead of them when they go to work. It is not all hunky-dory, sailing around in a nice big ship. No, when they go to work, their lives are on the line every day and every night.

The commissioner said he did not agree with a lot of what we said because things are much better than we portrayed. That is not what the average person who works in the Coast Guard is saying.

We are not here to be popular with the commissioner. We are not here to be popular with the minister. We are not here to be popular with the government. We are here to get a job done. We are here to make sure that the Coast Guard that protects the people who travel our oceans are safe and looked after and that the Coast Guard people who work in that great institution can fulfill their other objectives as well.

Having said that, I say to the minister that we are not here tonight to criticize, as was mentioned by the parliamentary secretary, and tell how bad things are in the Coast Guard. We are here to give examples of what we are hearing, not from people who are not connected, but from people who work in the institution. They see what is happening to them.

We are here to support the minister as he goes to the government, to Treasury Board, to the Minister of Finance as he prepares his budget, to look for money.

I remind the minister that just a year ago we were discussing the state of our marine infrastructure. It was the fisheries committee and the presentations that were made that embarrassed the government. The government was told by its own people that \$400 million was needed to bring the wharfs up to par, that 21% of the wharfs were unsafe. It was because of what came out truthfully from the witnesses that the government was embarrassed to the point that it gave the minister \$100 million over a five year period on top of what he gets for the small crafts harbours division.

If as a result of our input here tonight and the other things we are doing outside, the minister receives money to keep the Coast Guard not in the state in which it is in now, but in the state it should be, our job will have been well done.

We have heard members talk about the west coast and about Nova Scotia. In the few minutes I have I want to zero in on Newfoundland and Labrador.

A number of duties are outlined for the Coast Guard. Let me just read them out in case the minister does not know:

Responsibilities: Safety of life at sea; protecting the environment; vessel screening; safe and efficient movement of traffic; broadcasting vital information such as notices to shipping of weather warnings; supporting other government agencies.

That is quite a chore. When it is being cut and cut, it is very hard to fulfill all those needs.

I have raised safety issues with the minister before. He has said that along with our own boats, despite the fact we are taking the odd one out of service, we now have an auxiliary. We have a great auxiliary back home. People train through the Coast Guard to effect search and rescue with smaller boats because of our changing fishery.

• (2020)

They can do their job as long as they have the resources. We are halfway through the present year in terms of budget, approaching the season when the needs are greater. The auxiliary does not have any money, nor does even the minister's own department, his own Coast Guard boats.

I have memos to prove it from his own people to his own people telling them to conserve fuel, to only use the boats when they have to and to reduce speed because it saves time. The skipper of a ship on an ocean in times of search, rescue or even travel, because of sea conditions, wind, storms, ice or whatever, does not want somebody in Ottawa telling him how fast he should move that ship along because of the safety of the people involved and the needs of the people with whom they probably will be involved in terms of search and rescue.

I did not pick up who, but someone said why not. Perhaps that person could picture somebody sitting in an office in Ottawa telling someone how to operate a ship on the Grands Banks of Newfoundland or on the coast of Labrador when the ship is surrounded by ice or there is a storm and they are trying to rescue a small fishing vessel.

We have a change in fishery in Newfoundland. Some years ago when the Coast Guard was much stronger and when we had more boats, more facilities than we have right now, we had big boats and we had little boats. The major fish companies had big draggers that were as big or bigger in a lot of cases than the Coast Guard boats. They could look after themselves quite well. We had small boats that operated within sight of land, practically inshore.

The fishery has changed. Not only have we gone from the 25 foot or the 30 foot trap skiff, to 45 foot and 65 foot long liners, almost everybody has gone to the midsize boat, anywhere from 35 foot, decked over and made into a small long liner, as we say, to the 65 foot or even to the 100 foot class. Not only have they moved up a little bit, they have had to move further and further from shore to get the meagre resource that is left. The small boats that fished within sight of land or within a few miles of land are now fishing out around and even outside the 200 mile limit.

Government Orders

The fishermen themselves, and we have them here tonight, members of the auxiliary, members of the Coast Guard, will tell us that all that is needed is the perfect storm and we could have major disasters. Every day in relation to the fishery and during the winter in particular with the seal fishery, many, many times the Coast Guard is called upon to assist people in search and rescue. The needs are greater than ever they were.

On top of that there is extra traffic in relation to the oil development off our coast. We talk about protecting the environment. There is an example. If there is ever a disaster, who do we think would be called upon? It would be front and centre the Coast Guard.

I talked about security. I have always said anybody could get into this country by plane or car, but they would be searched and so would their car, bumper to bumper. However if they used a boat, a dory, and it was a foggy day or night, there are many parts of our country, whether we are talking about terrorists or drug traffickers, they could move into this country without even being noticed. If members do not believe me they should ask the people who operate the radar.

The minister says it is an RCMP problem. It is, but who do the Mounties call when there is a case in relation to security on the ocean? It is certainly not ghostbusters. They call the Coast Guard.

I wish I had more time to speak because there are so many things I could put on the record. Let me say to the minister that we are not here to complain. We are here to highlight concerns that I hope you and the government will listen to, to make sure our Coast Guard can continue to do the type of work it originally was intended to do and not be hamstrung by the type of operation that we see at present.

● (2025)

The Chairman of Committees of the Whole: Before we proceed to questions and comments, I just want to remind colleagues that interventions must be made through the Chair because sometimes directing our comments in a more familiar fashion by saying “you this and you that”, leads us down a path and let us just not go there. We must go through the Chair.

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, certainly the member and I take your comments to heart and understand your instructions, but we have become such good friends through question period that it is difficult to be too formal.

I thank the member for most of his comments, but I would ask him whether he is aware that since 9/11 we have increased the notification period for foreign ships coming into our waters. I am working from memory, but I believe it is 96 hours, so we know well ahead of time and are able to monitor them.

He would also know that our ships are all available to go on duty. We have concerns about fuel costs. Fuel costs have increased greatly, so in order to use our resources properly we asked that ships not be in motion when they do not have to be but that they be ready to patrol.

I would ask the member if he could refresh my memory as to when I would have told him that we were lessening our dependence

on the Coast Guard and increasing it on the auxiliary. I have no memory of that discussion.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: I'll send you a copy of Hansard.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Thank you. I would appreciate that. It would be imaginative, I am sure.

The hon. member would also know that our search and rescue capabilities are of course complemented by the military, by the brand new Cormorant helicopters, by military shipping, and by commercial shipping also, as well as the auxiliary. Together they play a great role in search and rescue, particularly in Newfoundland where ships do go out far.

I also would ask the member if he is aware that one of my first honours as Minister of Fisheries and Oceans was to sign a five year funding agreement, the highest funding ever from the Government of Canada for the auxiliary, a very good investment. The service received by the Canadian public from the auxiliary is at little cost to the Canadian public and of great benefit. I would ask the member whether he is aware of that.

The Chairman of Committees of the Whole: I get the impression the members are all such good friends that perhaps they do not need me, but I think I will stick around just in case.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I do suggest that you stay around.

I say to the minister in answer to his five questions, yes, yes, yes, yes and yes. I am very much aware, and I wish the minister were as much aware of what is going on with the Coast Guard as most of the members here. I do not mean to slight others, but many of them are on the fisheries committee and live in fishing or marine areas and are well aware of what is happening.

I will deal with the questions very quickly. In relation to the funding for the auxiliary, I congratulate the minister. It was a tremendous move. It has done a great amount of work, but it was like always when the government announces money. Everyone says, wow, it is a lot of money, but it is over 5 years, 10 years or whatever and is announced 15 times, so when it gets to the people who need it, there is not so much money. Right now, halfway through the year, as I said to the minister, the auxiliary is out of money. What good is the money if it is not there when the real time of need arrives?

Let me also say to the minister that I was intrigued when he said we are protected in relation to security because we have now increased notice time to 96 hours. That is like making a reservation at a hotel. When we go to a hotel now, the first thing it wants is our credit card, and if we do not tell them we are not coming, it will charge us anyway if the reservations are not made ahead of time.

What we are really saying to terrorists or anyone else if they want to come to our country is that instead of calling us 24 hours before they come in, as they used to have to do, they have to call us 96 hours ahead of time. I am just wondering how many terrorists or drug smugglers pick up the phone and call the Coast Guard to say “we are coming into Newfoundland” or coming into British Columbia. The only way we know they are coming in is if we pick them up on radar or our boats see them while at sea. If our boats are not at sea, they cannot see them.

As well, many parts of our country, regardless of what the minister says, are not covered by radar. We do not have enough to cover all the coasts. If I know that there are places where we can come in without being seen, if the members know that there are places where we can come in without being seen, if the minister knows, whether he will admit it or not, that there are places where we can come in without being seen, do we not think the drug pushers and terrorists also know? I rest my case.

● (2030)

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the hon. member from St. John's for his comments tonight. I wanted to draw to his attention our MCTS centres, the marine communications and traffic services centres, that are watching the traffic flow up and down the coast. I know the hon. member was with us when the committee visited these centres.

I wonder if he would comment on the problems we have with the *ab initio* training program. That is training for officers. I believe we have the best and well trained officers manning our posts, but they are getting older and many of them are nearing retirement. The training to replace these officers, which takes quite a bit of time, simply has not been done, especially from the west coast.

We visited the Canadian Coast Guard College in Sydney, Nova Scotia, an excellent facility. It is actually quite busy training officers from other countries who are coming here to receive the benefits of our knowledge. It seems tragic to me that we are not training our own officers to replace our hard-working people on the coasts.

In addition to that, I wonder if he would comment on what we saw in terms of notices of suspension shipping services that are not going out. The coast is not being watched at times and hundreds of miles of coastline are just simply not being watched at all.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Chairman, I thank my colleague for his questions.

When we were in British Columbia and toured practically every station along the coast, we heard basically the same story at all of them, a story completely opposite to that which we heard from the regional director's office when we stopped over. Members might say that they were telling us stories behind management's back, but that was not the case because we had management officials with us who were undoubtedly sent to make sure that nobody spoke out of line. The people in the stations were so fed up with the situation they did not care who was there. They were laying the truth on the line.

In relation to training, there were a couple of major concerns. Our sites on the west coast, and undoubtedly those on the east coast, were so tightly manned or so undermanned that quite often they could not find time to let people off on leave to go for training. When the opportunity arose only a few could go. As the member said in regard to the training centre in Nova Scotia, the principal of which, by the way, is a good Newfoundlander and it is certainly not his fault what is happening, because of the way the work is dictated people are coming from all over the country and all over the world to be trained, as they are in other parts of the country.

We have so much potential in relation to ocean technology and naval possibilities it is unbelievable, but we are not taking advantage

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of it. Very few people can get training. We have an aging population of people with the expertise in manning these sites. Unless we can train young people, who are so ready and willing to go, we are going to lose this expertise very quickly.

The other thing we found at a lot of these stations, with examples given to us, was the concern about near misses of large ocean liners because they could not be detected, with sites down, with areas that were not covered by radar, along with weather conditions when the weather deteriorated and loss of visibility and such. Actually in one case the person telling us the story had tears in her eyes because of the impact it had on her.

It is no pleasure to work in the Coast Guard because of the responsibilities. It would be a little bit better if they were not, as we say in Newfoundland, overworked and undernourished.

● (2035)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question will be a short one.

This summer, in my region, in the Magdalen Islands, we experienced a rather major problem. Whenever there was a private entrepreneur who could provide the necessary service when a fishing boat experienced a breakdown, the Coast Guard would completely withdraw and the private entrepreneur, who would charge the fisher a fee, would go and get the boat.

Of course, fishers were upset and they did not accept this situation. The private entrepreneur was forced to stop operating.

I would like to know if the same thing happened in the hon. member's province, in Newfoundland?

[*English*]

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Chairman, I think the minister answered the question earlier when he talked about cost recovery. It is getting to the point where we pay for practically everything. The government argues, the minister will argue and other ministers will argue this way: "Is it not fair that people pay for the services provided?"

If we are dealing with the private sector, these people are in the business to make money and we know what we are getting at first hand. If we are dealing with services provided by government, unless I miss my guess entirely I think we pay for the services. We pay taxes so that government provides services to people, not on a cost recovery basis but because it is prepaid and paid for by a lot of people who will never need the services.

I will say to the member that I think we are going to see more and more of this cost recovery, because as government siphons off money into foolish programs that are not necessary and gives lucrative contracts to its friends, somebody has to pay for it. Who pays for it? The ordinary taxpayer. And we are already paying enough to provide the services we need.

Mr. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, to begin my remarks I want to talk about some of the history of the Canadian Coast Guard and the role it plays and has played in Canadian life. I want to put these remarks in context.

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I do not see very many people in the House right now, Mr. Chairman, with the exception of yourself and the member for Delta—South Richmond, who were around in 1994-95 when our government faced a \$42 billion annual deficit. At that time we had what we called a program review, in which every department, with the exception of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, I think, had 30% cut from its budget. This minister is living in clover compared to what his predecessors had to go through in 1994-95-96.

Those members over there were not around then. I think they came in as a result of some of the things we had to do, the hard decisions we had to make in those years, decisions on EI, Atlantic transportation subsidies, the elimination of the Holy Crow, et cetera. We dealt with it. The majority of us did survive. New members came in from the other provinces. We used to have every seat in Nova Scotia. We allowed some of the members from other parties to be elected and come to the House and represent their people.

Pretty soon those same members will be asking the government, because we have a surplus, for at least \$5 billion more for health. It is a good idea. We should be putting more money into health. All the research says we should be putting more money into health and it is only \$5 billion. Then the same people will say we will need \$5 billion more for equipment for our armed forces. That is \$10 billion more in spending right away. There goes our current surplus, but they will not stop there. They will continue to want services in every government department.

They have said they want to help the minister get some money for the Coast Guard. He has already been able to put back into the system over \$100 million that was cut out in the bad old cutting days. If they really want to help the minister, they will have to moderate their demands for the other things they want. That would make our minister's job of getting money back into the Coast Guard much easier.

When the amalgamation occurred and the Coast Guard left the Department of Transportation and went into the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, I had the misfortune of being chair of the fisheries committee at that time. The member for Delta—South Richmond was one of the members of that committee back then. It was a pretty rough time trying to convince people that these moves had to be made. The Coast Guard and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans did not really jive perfectly. There was a lot of elbowing and a lot of territorial fighting between the two services, but we survived. We are surviving that. We are providing the services. The two services are getting more used to each other and getting back more money and resources. I certainly hope that the minister is successful in getting more resources from his cabinet colleagues to restore further money to the Canadian Coast Guard.

With that preamble, I would like to make a few more remarks. Even with the flaws that now exist with the Canadian Coast Guard, it is still one of the most effective and efficient marine search and rescue systems in the world. I will give members a little history. This system goes back to the time of Confederation, when the federal government accepted the responsibility to maintain lifeboat stations as detailed in the British North America Act of 1867.

Over the years, this system has greatly evolved and now includes the Royal Canadian Air Force and indeed all resources of the federal

government that can be detached to the aid of persons in distress. Shortly after the second world war, the government appointed the Royal Canadian Air Force as the overall authority for commanding and controlling SAR missions in response to mariners in distress, while using all available government resources.

● (2040)

In 1962 the Canadian Coast Guard was created as a national institution, with its highest priority being to save mariners in distress. The Coast Guard has been saving lives ever since.

In 1976 to further increase the effectiveness and efficiency of Canada's search and rescue system, the government created the national search and rescue program, which is an inter-agency arrangement under the leadership of the Minister of National Defence, who is Canada's lead minister for search and rescue.

Planning is conducted through the interdepartmental committee on search and rescue to ensure the highest levels of cooperation between all agencies involved. This system is second to none in the world and the Canadian Coast Guard is a strong and key part of this search and rescue system. The safety of life at sea is the highest priority of the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard, in cooperation with its partners such as the Canadian Forces, the volunteers of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary and others, responds to nearly 6,500 marine search and rescue incidents each year. Some of these incidents are distress situations where lives are in grave and imminent danger, while other incidents are less dramatic and may involve towing in a broken down vessel before the situation deteriorates into a distress.

Concerning the distress incidents, the Coast Guard, in cooperation with its partners, saves approximately 3,100 lives annually. Each year more than 97% of people in distress on Canadian waters are saved. This works out to be about eight lives a day, assisting a further 55 people each day in search and rescue missions. This record of success makes Canada's search and rescue system one of the most effective in the world. It is something of which all Canadians can be and are proud.

The number of lives that the Coast Guard saves is not an abstract number. These are real people who in many cases owe their lives to the Canadian Coast Guard's dedicated members.

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If I may speak a little more specifically, I will give a few examples of where these people serve within the Canadian Coast Guard. At this very moment there are Coast Guard officers and crew aboard vessels and at shoreside operation centres providing a primary search and rescue coverage. This includes 31 lifeboat stations, 9 patrol vessels and one hovercraft unit which maintains the minimum half-hour standby posture or better, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We have 22 marine communications vessel traffic centres which monitor distress frequencies 24 and 7 and 5 rescue centres, three of which are jointly staffed with the Canadian Forces, which control all search and rescue missions under the authority of the Canadian Forces search and rescue regional commander.

Further to these search and rescue resources, it must be noted that any vessel within the entire fleet of 108 Coast Guard vessels which is at sea on another mission or available while secured alongside, is immediately tasked by a rescue centre to any search and rescue mission as required.

The Coast Guard, like all other government departments and agencies, has reduced its spending, but the CCG has done it in a careful manner, prioritizing its multiple missions and keeping search and rescue as the number one operational priority. As an example, I refer to the government's increased funding to the Coast Guard's search and rescue services as part of the program integrity funding initiative.

In 2000 the government injected \$115.5 million in new funds into the Coast Guard to establish eight new lifeboat stations, increase the staff at our research centres, and to secure long term funding for our search and rescue patrol vessels. I am happy to report that two of these new lifeboat stations are in service and the remaining six will soon be in service. Further, the staffing levels have been increased in our rescue centres.

It is proof that the Government of Canada takes search and rescue services seriously. I can assure the House that in addition to further improvements in technology, regulations and operations, the CCG will continue to find ways to strengthen these services in the years ahead to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

In closing, I would like to restate that the men and women of the Canadian Coast Guard continue to deliver one of the most effective and highly respected search and rescue services in the world and that the Government of Canada remains committed to continuing its support of our search and rescue services.

• (2045)

The Chairman of Committees of the Whole: I take note that notwithstanding that the member for Egmont is somewhat removed from us a little further away, he seems to have created a tremendous amount of interest with a lot of people here.

Again I simply make the suggestion that if the questions can be phrased within a minute, and the response in the equal amount of time, then we will get as many people on as possible. I will begin with the hon. member for Delta—South Richmond.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Chairman, I compliment the member for Egmont on that marvellous speech. It was undoubtedly prepared by the Coast Guard.

I know from internal documents how Coast Guard bureaucrats treat government members. I would like to quote from one such document of May 7. It was prepared by Mr. Henderson, the regional director of the Canadian Coast Guard. This was after the committee's visit to the Coast Guard station last spring. He said, "A member of the local media accompanied this standing committee when they arrived at the base. I explained to the member from Malpeque that we would prefer this working group to be restricted to standing committee members and their staff. The member from Malpeque agreed and she did not participate".

So that was very cozy. Then he noted that the member for Bras d'Or—Cape Breton and the member for Malpeque talked at length about their pride in the Canadian Coast Guard. He said that a follow-up 45-minute meeting with members of the standing committee was scheduled for May 8, that Henderson, Wootton and Nemrava would attend and that the member from Malpeque and Bras d'Or—Cape Breton agreed it would be an in-camera session

As we read the document, we find that there is a very cozy relationship, that the Coast Guard bureaucrats feel in a way that they are herding sheep when they are dealing with these government members.

I would like to ask the member how it feels to be herded like sheep by a member of the Coast Guard bureaucracy?

• (2050)

Mr. Joe McGuire: Mr. Chairman, the only bovine that I have heard bang here tonight is the member for Delta—South Richmond. The government has a very important service in the Canadian Coast Guard which works with our military and RCMP and that provides the best service possible under the circumstances. It is doing a very effective job.

To have its efforts and the risks it takes in its daily operations undermined and basically reduced to a statement by the hon. member does a great disservice to a very proud organization.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I know that we must address the Chair and that you are always involved in the debates, but I would like to put the question directly. Here is my question.

In May, the Coast Guard commissioner said "There is too great a discrepancy between the Coast Guard's budgets and its mandates".

I would like to know if the hon. member disagrees with the Coast Guard commissioner. I would like to know if he contradicts the commissioner's comments. I would like to know if he hopes the Coast Guard commissioner will resign, since he does not seem to agree with the comments that he made.

Is this what he really wants? Does he want the Coast Guard commissioner to resign? Because the commissioner himself said that the budgets allocated are inadequate and that we are not living in the best possible world. I would like an answer.

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[English]

Mr. Joe McGuire: Mr. Chairman, nobody said that the Coast Guard was fully funded or funded to the capacity that it could be. Neither is the military and probably neither are most of our government departments.

There is a problem. There was a program review. There was a reduction of 30% in the Coast Guard's budget. There were increased user fees. All these things had to be done because we had to deal with a \$42 billion annual deficit and we did deal with it.

It was not the only service that had to tighten its belt, to find new, better ways and ways to cooperate with other agencies, whether provincial or private. It is great to come in as the opposition and say that there should be money for every possible thing under the sun, that everything that their constituents demand or say should be there, should automatically be there. That is not the way the world works.

If we are to stay in a surplus situation, we have to use our money as wisely as possible. We will have to use our cooperative resources as much as possible to avoid duplication, as we are with our armed forces, the RCMP and our navy. We are making do. We are doing a very good job. We have one of the better search and rescue, if not the best search and rescue service in the world. We are getting the job done. We should be proud of our service.

We should not be doing what those people over there are doing by trying to blow holes in it to get some brownie points from the people back home or those who may be pulling their strings.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chairman, the only brownie points to be gained here are by that member trying to get into the cabinet one day.

He wanted to know where we can save money: \$211 million is being spent on a new Gothic building in the National Capital region; \$100 million was spent on Challenger jets which DND said were not needed; and almost \$1 billion on Bill C-68, the gun legislation, which was only supposed to cost \$85 million.

The former Liberal minister of health, the hon. Monique Bégin, was in our caucus this morning and said that if the federal and provincial administrative aspects of the health care system were organized better, then 15% could be saved on costs. That means billions of dollars could be saved.

If the hon. member wants to know where the money could from without raising taxes, the government could do a much better job of managing the federal departments. It could then ensure that departments like the Coast Guard would get the funding they needed.

We are not here to score brownie points. We are here to convince that minister and this member that the argument is valid and true and that the men and women of the Coast Guard require more resources and better direction than they are getting now.

Could the member comment on that?

• (2055)

Mr. Joe McGuire: Mr. Chairman, one place where the Coast Guard is spending some dollars is in Summerside, Prince Edward Island. A Canadian Coast Guard official said today in the local

newspaper that the search and rescue station is a nice fit. It is in the process of building a search and rescue boat that is worth \$2.5 million. One will be built also for the search and rescue station in Souris. A search and rescue station has been established for the Bay of Fundy and is situated in the City of Saint John. This is a brand new station, with brand new boats, and it is doing an excellent job in the Bay of Fundy.

Those services should be extended to the rest of Atlantic Canada. They should be extended to southwest Nova Scotia, to the new Coast Guard facility in Summerside and to a new boat in the Coast Guard facility in Souris. This is where resources are going. This is what we are doing to ensure that mariners who are in trouble will receive a quick response.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Chairman, when we started the question and comment period you mentioned that the member was removed from the rest of us. If I made a speech like that, I would want to be near the door also.

The member talked about a \$43 billion deficit that the Liberals inherited in 1993. The Tory government left that \$43 billion deficit because it inherited a \$38 billion deficit from the previous Liberal government and ran up the extra deficit when interest rates were at 22%, 23% and 24%. Did it cut services? No, it did not. A plan was introduced to address it called the GST, which nobody wanted. Those guys campaigned against it and won an election, but it addressed the deficit.

Free trade, which also helped balance the budget, addressed the deficit. The Liberals had one novel idea that the Tories did not have. We had free trade and GST, a plan to address the deficit without cutting services, including the Coast Guard. They had a plan which included cutting social programs and cutting the guts out of health and education, which they did because it is on the record.

Between all of this the Liberals created a surplus and bragged about it. They should not have a surplus when there are needs in health care, when our children cannot afford to go to school and when the Coast Guard is looking for money.

The member told us that all the good work—

The Chairman of Committees of the Whole: I have been more than generous. I think the member for Egmont has a pretty good idea where we are going here.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Chairman, with all the work the Coast Guard does can the government not support giving it more money?

Mr. Joe McGuire: Mr. Chairman, I am quite comfortable speaking from my own seat. I did not have to go up to the seat of the Leader of the Opposition to pretend that I am the Leader of the Opposition. He should have been over here opposite me. I know it will be many years before he has the chance to legitimately sit up there, but he will have to increase his numbers a lot more than they are now when his party is barely a party. One less seat and it would not be recognized as a party in the House.

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The Conservatives get all excited about the great things they did when they were a government but they tripled the national debt. It went from two hundred and some billion dollars to over \$700 billion. Now the member is taking credit for us getting them out of the hole. This is really unbelievable. It is new math, I believe.

One thing we can rely on our Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to do is to go to bat for the people for whom he is responsible in his department. I do not think anybody would undercut or second guess the minister in that regard.

We on this side of the House will be giving him every assistance possible through our Atlantic caucus or national caucus to assist him in his efforts to get more money for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and, in particular, the Coast Guard.

• (2100)

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Chairman, I will bring this back to a more sombre note. I rise with a heavy heart. This debate is about the future of the Coast Guard. The Canadian Coast Guard is filled with proud and capable men and women who give it their best. They are always out there and are always ready and willing. They have completely given us their faith do their job and it is time that we, as parliamentarians, gave them our faith.

As parliamentarians, we should be asking one simple question. What can we do to help them to do their job?

Five of my constituents lost their lives last summer when the *Cap Rouge II* capsized. Gone forever are Cathy Mabblerley, her son Wyatt and her daughter Amanda, and Ron Wilson and Tony Head. Their deaths have shattered the close-knit communities on Galiano and Salt Spring Island.

No words in this place can heal this wound. I am also a husband and the father of two small children and I cannot imagine anything happening to my children. I offer the survivors, their families and the entire Gulf Islands community my very deepest sympathy, as does, I am sure, every member of the House.

Could these five people have been saved? We will never know, but we do owe it to their memories that when a tragic accident like this happens again, and I did not say "if", the men and women of the Coast Guard have the resources and the tools to do the job.

The government must shoulder its share of responsibility for what has happened. It has cut Coast Guard resources and has tied the hands of Coast Guard staff.

My colleagues from the NDP and the Tories have talked a lot about the east coast. I will focus a little more on the west coast.

Excluding the Arctic, the B.C. coastline accounts for almost one-third of all of Canada, over 22,000 kilometres of coastline. It is a serious challenge to patrol and government cuts have not made it easier.

Spending on the Coast Guard has declined by over \$100 million in the last six years, almost 20%.

Chapter 31 of the 2000 Auditor General's report cited the serious deficiencies in capital procurement at the Canadian Coast Guard. Two years and two budgets have passed without any substantive

action. This is a chronic problem we have seen with the government. The Auditor General and many departments have come forward citing these deficiencies but nothing ever happens.

The problem is considerable. The 1999 estimates put the cost of replacing the fleet at a total of \$2.2 billion. The lifespan of a ship averages 30 years and the average age of the larger Coast Guard ships is currently 22 years. The Auditor General stated that the department should be investing between \$140 million and \$150 million of capital funding per year. The actual investment has been somewhere around \$30 million, which is about 20% of what it should be investing.

In December 2000 the Auditor General said:

Although the Department knows that the fleet is unable to meet even some of the most basic service expectations, it has not made a consistent attempt to either track or disclose the nature and extent of these gaps in service.

This is deplorable. The government has been told, not by us but by the Auditor General, a credible, independent source in 2000, two years ago. What has happened? Nothing.

Following the *Cap Rouge II* tragedy, I forwarded to the minister over 2,000 signatures calling for more search and rescue resources. Earlier today I tabled formal petitions, along with many of my colleagues. Again the hon. member for Delta—South Richmond was leading the charge on that, as he has on this issue for years. Hundreds and thousands of Canadians are calling for this.

Gulf Islanders in my riding make their lives upon the ocean. They have been warning the federal government for years that the resources have been stretched too thin.

At the Ganges Coast Guard base on Salt Spring Island, distress calls are routinely answered when it is simply too far for other locations to respond quickly. Mostly volunteers, these good men and women deserve the support of the government. Government cuts hurt these small, inexpensive bases most. We must support them, and I emphasize the auxiliary as well which has a base on Pender and on the peninsula.

• (2105)

The men and women of the Coast Guard put their lives on the line for us. They never question when they are called out to duty. They never even quiver. When they are called out, in any kind of conditions, they go. It is time we did the same for them.

Let me focus a bit on the dive policy. Money for the Coast Guard can be obtained by eliminating a little of the waste I would suggest, as was just mentioned. However some of the reforms will cost nothing to save lives.

Coast Guard divers were directed not to enter the *Cap Rouge II* on August 13. They did everything they could, apart from entering the vessel, but had to wait hours for a military dive team to arrive. Forcing these divers to sit and wait when they might have been able to rescue those victims is unconscionable.

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We cannot blame the divers. I would argue that they are like firemen. When they go into a burning building they do not pull out their manual. They do not have a supervisor then it is on fire but they cannot go in. These are trained professionals. Let them make the decision whether they can go in and do something safely. We must give them the resources and the equipment to do the job and allow them to assess the situation. How can someone sitting in an ivory tower on a telephone decide whether they should be going in or not?

I think it is time we called a spade a spade. Even worse, there are reports that senior Coast Guard personnel specifically ordered these Coast Guard personnel who are trained divers not to enter the capsized vessels and, if they did, their jobs would be on the line. No one wants to say it but there are lots of reports out there. Hopefully when the inquiry is held, if we ever get one, this will all come out, because it is unconscionable. I know two inquiries are pending and they must also include a complete analysis of the diving regulations if they are going to have any meaning.

An inquiry is needed but common sense suggests that we must take immediate steps. As I have said earlier, these are trained professionals. We should let them assess the situation and determine whether they should be going into a capsized vessel. We should give them the discretion to assess the situation.

I appreciate that some of these waters can be dangerous but if cannot trust them who can we trust? The minister said that he was proud of the Coast Guard divers who responded to *Cap Rouge II*. I was also proud but pride is not enough. It is time the government put some bucks on the table. It is time it gave the resources. It is time it started dealing with some of the issues at the Sea Island base in the Lower Mainland by ensuring the resources are there. It is time it put an additional hovercraft there instead of just standing up in here and saying that they are proud of these men and women. We are all proud of these men and women. Let us show it.

The divers on site have bitterly expressed how disappointed they were that they were forbidden to enter the vessel. Michael Wing, national head of the Union of Canadian Transport Employees stated "We do not want to have more deaths associated with Coast Guard's mismanagement and inability to provide very clear communication and direction".

Gary Biggar, friend of the Maberley family said "The divers weren't confused. They know what they're doing. The government is confused on what's going on".

I would like to thank the many residents of Saanich—Gulf Islands who collected thousands of signatures calling for change. They helped cause this debate. I thank Les Biggar, Drew Clark and Carolyn Thom for their dedication and commitment to this cause.

Today I ask the government to heed these voices. Do not let the deaths of these good people go in vain. It is time to do more than congratulate the Coast Guard on its work. It is time to put the resources into it. That is what Parliament needs to do.

• (2110)

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Chairman, I congratulate my friend on his speech this evening. I know he had business elsewhere this evening but he

stayed behind to participate in this debate. It is a difficult issue and one which my friend has spent a considerable amount of time on, not only since the capsizing of the *Cap Rouge II* but on the Coast Guard fisheries issues in the years past.

He mentioned the feelings of the families and the people of the community that were affected by this tragic accident. I would like to know what the feeling is in the community about the response of the government, about the fact that the minister is giving one opinion that somehow the divers were entitled to enter the capsized vessel even though the ship safety manual clearly prohibits that. What sort of a feeling is there in the community about these confusing messages coming from the government?

Mr. Gary Lunn: Mr. Chairman, in short, they are frustrated. They do not think they are getting straight answers from the government. When this happens people immediately go into cover their backside mode to ensure that everything is okay and that they did their best.

What should be done is to say they will make sure this does not happen again. There was a serious screw up here and it did not need to happen.

Again, I do not know if the outcome would have been any different. Nobody will ever know that. We do know there will be more accidents. That is a given. We want to make sure that this does not happen again. We want to make sure that they have the resources, the policy and the discretion to do the job. We want to make sure it is not a bunch of people in an ivory tower telling them how to do it.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chairman, I know my colleague has to leave, but I do have a comment to put on the record.

My colleague represents the Gulf Islands. It must be difficult for him as he represents a community which lost five people in a tragic accident. I know he is not saying that the Coast Guard caused the accident. He is saying that an accident occurred and possibly the Coast Guard with a clear direction, the right mandate and proper resources may have saved a life or two. We do not know and we will never know.

Hopefully we can have an inquiry and get to the bottom of that situation. If and when an incident such as that ever happens again on the west coast or anywhere else, the men and women of the Coast Guard will have clear directions.

The Strait of Juan de Fuca is one of the busiest sea lanes on the entire planet. Nuclear submarines, commercial fishing vessels, recreational fishing vessels, oil tankers and military vessels go back and forth. Tofino is the ears and eyes for that seaway. When we were in Tofino they mentioned that they need \$10 million more just to do the bare minimum of their job.

That is such an important commercial seaway. By the way, our United States cousins rely on us to be their ears and eyes and watch for them. Why would we in any way, shape or form even consider cutting in that type of area? It is simply unconscionable and unacceptable.

Government Orders

We had an incident with the *Cap Rouge II*. Imagine if a nuclear submarine hit an oil tanker because there were not the proper resources to warn the two of a possible collision. I do not want to be around the day an incident like that happens, and it very well could happen. We need to give the people at the MCTS centre in Tofino everything at their disposal to ensure they have every single tool and opportunity and trained personnel to do the job.

• (2115)

Mr. Gary Lunn: Mr. Chairman, first I want to thank the member for Delta—South Richmond for ensuring that we had this take note debate. Attention should be paid to the members from the NDP, the Tories, the Alliance and the Bloc Québécois. All the members are focused on the issue.

We are all talking of the seriousness of the issue. This is not about politics. This is about the men and women of the Coast Guard. It is a critical time for them and we have to give them the resources and the tools to do the job.

When all four opposition parties are speaking from the same page, something is wrong.

[Translation]

Mr. Georges Farrah (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I would simply like to put a question to my colleague about the *Cap Rouge II* affair.

In a press release that he himself made public the day after the unfortunate incident, and in which he offered his sympathy to the family—and it was quite appropriate at the time—he said the following, and I quote:

[English]

“We need to let the investigators do their job before we draw any conclusions”.

[Translation]

Three concurrent investigations are now underway, following this incident: that of the Workmen's Compensation Board, the Transportation Safety Board and the provincial coroner.

In order to ensure I understand the member, given that he says we must await the conclusions of these investigations before making a definitive judgment and ensuring that are no more accidents such as this, I find it inconsistent that he makes a judgment, when in a press release, he said that we should await the results of the investigation. Obviously, the investigation has not yet finished yet.

I would like it if the member could clarify this situation.

[English]

Mr. Gary Lunn: Mr. Chairman, I would be very pleased to. Quite quickly, I agree. We may never know, even after the inquiries. None of us will ever know if those lives could have been saved. I am not making a judgment on that. What we are talking about today is what we do know. We are talking about the facts. We are talking about the cuts to the Coast Guard. We are talking about the desperate need for resources.

The *Cap Rouge II* was one incident. It happened to be in my riding and it was terrible. My heart bleeds for those families. I am not trying to pass judgment as the investigators do their work. What

the member for Delta—South Richmond and the others are talking about are the facts that we do know, the stuff that is public. That is what we are trying to bring to the attention of the government, that this is a critical issue and the government needs to put the resources in so that those men and women can do their jobs.

We know there will be more rescues. It is not a matter of if, it is a matter of when. We want to make sure that they have the resources to do the job. We do know today that they do not.

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I am very pleased that the House has set aside some time to discuss this issue. I am very happy to see that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is here to listen to the comments that members have.

In the short time that I have and the comments that I intend to make, I am probably preaching to the converted if I were speaking to the minister. In all likelihood what I would like to say at the start is that really my comments truly will be directed to the Minister of Finance. I hope that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans takes these comments to the Minister of Finance as he prepares the next budget.

On October 18, 2001 as a member of the fisheries committee I sat with others and listened to senior officials of DFO and the Canadian Coast Guard along with the Canadian Coast Guard Marine Communication and Traffic Services officers from British Columbia.

I think it would be fair to say gently that the testimony we heard startled us. It startled us to the extent that we as a committee decided it was necessary to go and see for ourselves and determine if what we heard at that time was indeed accurate.

We rather hastily arranged a trip to the west coast from November 20 to 23. We visited Vancouver, Victoria, Tofino and Prince Rupert. In particular, our visit for all intents and purposes was to examine the Marine Communication and Traffic Services of Canada on the west coast. We did have other business which we conducted but what I am going to talk about today is MCTS.

I am holding a brochure from MCTS which describes its mission:

The mission of MCTS Centres is to provide marine communications and traffic services for the marine community and the general public in order to: (1) save lives at sea; (2) protect the environment; (3) promote efficient vessel movement; and (4) disseminate accurate marine information.

There was however a fifth possible service discussed at that time, bearing in mind what I said about the date of the meeting, October 18, 2001, which was shortly after September 11. The employees brought to our attention that they felt there were some significant gaps in Canada's security coverage of the west coast. They pointed out that Canada's west coast has vast unpopulated areas, which we all know, where drug and contraband smugglers, illegal immigrants and other people might try to enter without being detected.

It was pointed out that there are not a lot of radar facilities that MCTS could use. It was also pointed out that MCTS helps the Department of National Defence in observing the comings and goings of vessels. They also made some very specific recommendations. Further they said:

Government Orders

On a daily basis MCTS Officers witness unidentified vessels proceed to Canada unchallenged by any other authority. Realistically, Canada can't expect the U.S. to open their borders to Canada when we leave the majority of our coast completely unguarded.

Given that that might have been some hyperbole, it certainly caused us to sit up and take notice and we went out there to check it out. Sad to say, I think it is accurate that the committee found what I would call eight observations. By the way we did go to the east coast and it was also confirmed on the east coast later on.

The first observation was that MCTS is the victim of chronic underfunding year after year. There are morale problems. There is a crumbling infrastructure which our chairman at that time called "rust out". This has to do with some of the radar facilities on remote islands which are constantly being pounded by the ocean surf, by spray and that sort of thing.

● (2120)

There was understaffing, which would be exacerbated in the future by the retirement of people who had given their entire lives to the service and were coming to the end of their careers and also by attrition. It takes over two years to become a fully qualified MCTS officer. It appeared to us at that time that there might be some gap between the time that people were retiring or would like to retire, because there were cases where people wanted to retire but they decided that they would not in the interests of the service because there was nobody there to replace them.

We also went to Seattle where we talked to the American coast guard, which has a slightly different role. Indeed, as the previous speaker said, it holds the MCTS in high regard and it is MCTS's job to patrol the Straits of Juan de Fuca on behalf of both countries. When I say patrol, I mean observe for the purposes of marine safety.

Seattle and the staff there told us that they had no doubts of the professionalism and dedication of MCTS officers. They had high praise for the cooperative vessel traffic service, which is a model of international cooperation, but they independently told us that their colleagues were spread too thin and they did not have enough money.

There is a lack of training. VTOSS, vessel traffic operations support system, is a system that was developed by a Canadian. It is praised by everyone, but it has not yet been fully documented. Both our Canadian and U.S. counterparts indicated that the gentleman who developed this system, Mr. Grant McGowan, should have at least two to three support staff to help him set this up properly and get it down on paper.

We had at that time some security concerns. We noted that the Coast Guard College on the east coast was also suffering from lack of funds. This is not good news because the Coast Guard and MCTS provide vital services and could be providing more of a service.

We are talking amounts of money that in the global budgets that the government is talking about are truly a pittance. At that time they were talking about \$1 million short. We have heard different figures: \$8 million, \$9 million, \$10 million and \$5 million. That is all peanuts in comparison to the kind of money that the government spends. It is a tragic situation that a service such as MCTS is chronically underfunded and that the employees must come to a

parliamentary committee in Ottawa to bring this to the attention members.

The problem is even further manifested because when we spoke to the officials in charge in British Columbia we were startled by the response. I am glad the minister is here because I want him to know that sometimes his bureaucrats will report things to him that certainly, from my own personal observation, are inaccurate. They said that they understood there was a shortfall, but MCTS was able to carry out its mandate, although this might entail the reallocation of funding within the existing Canadian Coast Guard Pacific Region funding envelope. In other words, bureaucratic baffle-gab for "Look, we do not have enough money, but we cannot get it from anywhere so we will just pretend everything is okay".

That is nonsense. We were shocked when we heard that. One would think the senior bureaucracy would come to the aid of the men and women on the frontlines and continue to press for more money. Perhaps they are, we do not hear about it. Perhaps it is only into the ear of the minister.

I say to the Minister of Finance, whom I believe still wears the minister of security hat, this is a shame. It is not to be allowed. It is not to be permitted to continue for the sake of the safety and security of our mariners and everyone on the oceans, and for the security of our three oceans. The Minister of Finance and I know the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is advocating this. We need further funding to help MCTS to protect our country.

● (2125)

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Chairman, I know my hon. friend across the way is a lawyer and I am feeling in need of a lawyer this evening. I want to ask him to clarify some issues for us here.

On August 28 the federal minister in charge of the Coast Guard said that government policy did not prohibit divers from entering a capsized fishing boat where five people, including two children, drowned earlier that month. Then, in the *National Post*, on September 7, he said:

...the divers are restricted, by regulations in the Canada Labour Code, to open water dives—that is, to diving outside the danger zone under a vessel where dangling nets, cables and other gear threaten to entangle a rescue worker.

There is a contradiction there. Earlier this evening I read the Coast Board fleet safety manual. It was quite clear that:

Penetration into capsized vessels, aircraft, or submerged vehicles and diving in the vicinity of underwater pressure differentials is strictly prohibited.

My reading of the Canada Labour Code issue is that it in fact requires the employer, the Coast Guard, to provide the proper safety equipment. I would take that to mean equipment that would enable the divers to do their job.

We have a contradictory statement from the minister. On the one hand, in August, he said that divers were able to enter, yet in September he said they were not. It is clear from the fleet safety manual that penetration dives are not permitted. The Canada Labour Code states that the onus is on the employer, the Coast Guard, to provide adequate equipment for its members.

Government Orders

Would the hon. member, my friend, who is a lawyer, clarify this complex problem for us?

• (2130)

Mr. Tom Wappel: Mr. Chairman, I know that the hon. member is concerned about this issue. He is passionate about the issue of fisheries in general and the Coast Guard specifically.

I do not wish to make light of his question. However, I doubt very much that he is prepared to pay my hourly fee to examine the documents which he mentioned and provide him with a written opinion. If he is, perhaps we can talk about it afterwards but certainly not on the floor of the House.

I would not for a moment, as a lawyer, try to wing it, and offer free legal advice without having examined all of the documents, listened to all of the evidence, compared all of the inquiries that are going to take place, and then draw the appropriate conclusions thereafter. Without appearing to weasel out of anything, because my hon. friend knows that I do not generally do that at all, I am not prepared to offer a legal opinion without having examined all facets of the argument.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Chairman, my colleague from the Toronto area recently became the chair of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. I take this opportunity to congratulate him.

I would like to address a problem that concerns the Great Lakes region, as well as the St. Lawrence River. I am talking about cost recovery for the Canadian Coast Guard.

What the industry and the Canadian advisory council, as well as the five advisory councils that make up the larger council, are saying is that this has had a significant negative impact on marine traffic on the St. Lawrence River, and even on the St. Lawrence Seaway and into the Great Lakes.

We are told that worldwide marine traffic is increasing because of globalization, of course. In our region, inland, on the St. Lawrence Seaway, however, traffic is declining because of the fees charged by the Canadian Coast Guard, among other things.

Here is how shipowners react: they touch in at port as seldom as possible, because each time they are charged the equivalent of \$3,700, if memory serves, from December 22 to May 5, or something like that.

The industry made a proposal that would give us an agreement for 10 years at least. Would my hon. colleague agree to approve the Marine Advisory Council's proposal to phase out marine service fees and to a term of 10 years on the proposed agreement?

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Wappel: Mr. Chairman, I have not seen the proposal. I have not had a chance to read it yet. Naturally I would be prepared to consider any reasonable suggestion, but as a general proposition I have no particular difficulty with a cost recovery program where it is just that: the recovery of costs to render a service. If it becomes a tax rather than a cost recovery scheme, then of course I am opposed to it.

If for some reason a cost recovery scheme were to have an abnormal effect on the particular area to which it is being

administered, then obviously we should have a look at it, but at this point, without having a clear understanding of what the owners are proposing, I would not want to make a commitment.

• (2135)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chairman, I too, on behalf of our party, wish to congratulate the member from Scarborough for his election as chairperson of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

For the record, we are a committee made up of five political parties that works cooperatively together and is extremely apolitical. I must give the member from Scarborough a lot of credit. A lot of people have asked me, "You have a member from Scarborough on your fisheries committee, what does he know about fish?"

Well I have watched him work very diligently, and although he admitted he did not know the difference between a seiner and a trawler, the fact is that he is willing to learn, he is willing to understand and he is willing to ask the difficult questions when they need to be asked in a respectful but tactful and direct manner by cutting through the bush.

The member was in Tofino. He rightfully talked about the Strait of Juan de Fuca and how busy that traffic system was. We heard Mr. Henderson say in Vancouver that money was not a problem. We heard the people in Tofino say something completely different.

With his experience in bureaucratic baffle-gab, why would the manager in charge of the Coast Guard on the west coast make such a bold statement in front of all of us, but when we went to Tofino we heard the workers and the managers there say something completely different? Why would that person say such a thing? I would like him to reflect upon that for a moment.

Mr. Tom Wappel: Mr. Chairman, I thank the member for his kind words. I may not yet know all the different types of nets but I do know a trap when I see one, and some of these questions bear a resemblance of a trap.

The observations of the hon. member were quite correct when referring to our visit to Tofino. The member will recall that we were all startled at Mr. Henderson's response. This may be hard to believe of a bunch of politicians, but we were startled, basically speechless, by the boldness with which that verdict was delivered by that gentleman.

I have absolutely no explanation as to how he could say that all was well when the people on the ground demonstrated to us that all was indeed not well. They talked about 25 year old equipment in Victoria, and radar sites on the islands falling apart and not being able to be serviced in the wintertime. We were so speechless we did not have the chance to ask him how he could make such a statement, but hopefully someone will.

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I want to start by joining with the member opposite in congratulating the member from Scarborough on being elected chair of the fisheries committee. I know we have a good chair. I welcome him as chair. I am pleased to have him as a colleague and if I am ever in need, judging by his answer to the member from Musquodoboit, I would love to have him as a lawyer.

Government Orders

I want to make a couple of points on what he said. He recognized that post-9/11, a lot of money was awarded to DFO to increase sea time for our fleets, to add aircraft patrol, to contract services with provincial airlines, and also with the military for Hercules aircraft.

We are currently in the process of modernizing our MCTS centres to world class centres using world class technology.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this take note debate on the Coast Guard.

I will begin by saying that, in the traditional definition of the roles, responsibilities and mandate of the state, there is this obligation to ensure the construction and maintenance of the various lines of communication, so as to guarantee the free movement of goods, services and money. In the case of Canada, this is particularly true for seaways.

Of all the world's countries, Canada is the one with the longest shorelines to patrol. The various seaways of the country are truly impressive. We are talking about 243,792 kilometres of shoreline, or 25% of the world's total. This is not to mention the numerous rivers of this vast land.

Under the Liberals, the federal government seems to have found another definition for the word "communication". For this government, "communication" has become synonymous with "propaganda". The government has gone from being a provider of services to being a provider of sponsorships and contracts to its friends. But this has not diminished its appetite for tax levies, with the result that, in spite a world economic slowdown, this government has managed to accumulate a surplus of close to \$10 billion.

And for good reason. As I said earlier, the government chose to reduce services and, in a number of cases, to increase revenues. Under these circumstances, it should come as no surprise that the government can accumulate significant surpluses. However, the situation of the provinces is just the opposite and this is what we mean by a fiscal imbalance. The provinces have much more important responsibilities than the federal government does, but their financial resources are much more limited.

The Coast Guard has also been affected by the approach of the Liberal government since it took office, and it has been the subject of cuts, while the government has also decided to make users pay.

We are talking about large sums of money. Earlier, the hon. member for Matapédia—Matane referred to the fact that the Coast Guard wanted to impose on all the ships sailing in eastern Canada a fee of \$5,700 for each call at a port, up to a maximum of 12, for a maximum cost of \$68,400 per ship. The fact is that 80% of the calls made by ships are at ports along the St. Lawrence River, between the Atlantic Ocean and the Great Lakes.

Most fortunately, after much negotiation and pressure from the Bloc Québécois, an agreement was reached to charge the shipping industry fees amounting to 50% of what they were initially wanting to charge for the various Coast Guard services, particularly navigational aids, vessel traffic services and ice breaking.

The disadvantage of the fee structure is that, since 80% of ships' calls are along the St. Lawrence Seaway, Quebec is penalized in the end because the shipping industry in Quebec has had to bear 80% of costs, while only one third of services provided by the Coast Guard are provided on the St. Lawrence.

One might well wonder, then, why suddenly the government comes along this evening with a take note debate on the Coast Guard. Perhaps one of the answers to this is that the agreement with the shipping industry ends in December 2002 and obviously new negotiations will be necessary for a new agreement the government hopes will enable it to continue to collect certain fees from the shipping industry.

● (2140)

That said, it is important to take another look at the argument used by my colleague from Matapédia—Matane just now. He said that the result of these fees being charged on the St. Lawrence has been a considerable drop in ship traffic. This runs counter to what is going on in the rest of the world, in this era of globalization and increased world trade, characterized by increased river and ocean transportation. Yet, because of these fees, the traffic on the St. Lawrence Seaway has decreased.

This is reason for concern and for suggesting that these fees not be renewed, as the ship industry has done, because we have seen what negative effects they have. Granted, the Coast Guard's funds are getting scarcer and scarcer, and are no longer sufficient to allow it to carry out its mandate properly.

I would like to continue on a subject that is of the utmost concern to me because it affects my riding directly—the riding of Verchères—Les-Patriotes—on top of the issues that I just raised, navigational aids, ice breaking, and shipping services, and that subject is shoreline erosion along the St. Lawrence. I would like to address this from two different angles that have to do with the Coast Guard. First, some years ago, the federal government established a shoreline protection program, which was run by the Canadian Coast Guard. I am going to approach the issue from this angle.

In the aftermath of the budget cuts that followed the Liberals' rise to power, a number of programs were cut, including this one. The end result is that all of the construction that had started along the St. Lawrence under this program was stopped. There was no periodical maintenance of this work, so the riverbank erosion problem continued for those who did not benefit from any federal government construction on their property. Every year, they lose several feet of property to erosion.

Government Orders

As for the people living along the shores who had their property protected by works of some kind, because of neglect, not only did these works no longer do what they had been built to do, but they had become dangerous over time. The problem these people are facing is that they do not know whether they are allowed to maintain something built by the federal government, because the issue of ownership remains unclear.

● (2145)

Theoretically, these works belong to the federal government, and the people living along the shores are wary of starting to repair these protection structures without first determining whether the government would ever consider suing them for altering its property. This raises a number of problems that will inevitably have to be addressed.

What members whose ridings are along the St. Lawrence River and I keep hearing from successive Ministers of Fisheries and Oceans is answers along the lines of “This is not the federal government's responsibility. We used to do it, but not anymore”. But it is not true that the responsibility does not rest with the federal government, even if only from the angle of the Coast Guard.

The paltry resources available to the Canadian Coast Guard have affected the efficiency and work of its members.

There are fewer and fewer vessel trips. As a result, the monitoring of ships on the St. Lawrence is declining, which makes it difficult to enforce speed limits on the river. In turn, this results in increased shoreline erosion.

All this to say that the federal government has a responsibility when it comes to shoreline erosion. This concerns the coast guard directly, and we expect that, in the next few months, the government will address this problem, finally take its responsibilities and provide assistance to the people living along the shores of the St. Lawrence River.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Chairman, first, I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent speech and I would like to add something to what he talked about.

Of course, he talked about icebreaking, about the fees charged by the Coast Guard, but he also talked about the shoreline protection program, a program that was abandoned. However, I would like to add something, and I will ask him my question after briefly describing another problem that occurred in the St. Lawrence Seaway because of the fees charged by the Coast Guard.

It concerns dredging. Currently, the Coast Guard charges dredging fees, in the St. Lawrence channel, to ships that call at a port located in the Seaway and in the St. Lawrence. Fees are not charged to ships that, for example, use the Seaway to travel to and from an American port. The Quebec and Canadian shipping industry is penalized once again. The Quebec and Canadian shipping industry is forced to pay for ships that are just passing through, that simply come from an American port or that come out of the Seaway or a port, or that travel the St. Lawrence to go to an American port. They are basically being asked to pay for competitors, to pay their way.

● (2150)

My question is this. Does the member think that it is acceptable that the government has used the Coast Guard as a tax collector and that there is so much injustice toward the Quebec and Canadian shipping industry?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Matapédia—Matane for his eloquent presentation earlier tonight. By the way, he is the Bloc critic on these issues.

To follow up on what I have just said, no, on the contrary, I do not think it is appropriate for the Coast Guard to have been turned into a tax collector just because of the government's financial requirements, which far exceed its responsibilities.

I think the member drew a pretty accurate picture of the situation, but let me add that the marine industry in Quebec and Canada is being asked to fund to some extent its own competitors that travel on the St. Lawrence on their way to and back from U.S. ports, without stopping anywhere in Quebec or in Canada in order to avoid paying the infamous fees being collected by the Coast Guard.

Such a situation has an impact not only on the marine industry in Quebec and Canada, but also on the communities where the ports are located. We cannot ignore the fact that port facilities create a lot of local jobs. So, there are economic spinoffs in these port communities. The slowdown in traffic due to the fees collected by the Coast Guard does have an impact on local economies. It is unfortunate not only that the Coast Guard has been turned into a tax collector, but also that the decision made by the federal government has had such an adverse impact on the economy of port communities.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chairman, I thank my hon. colleague from the Bloc for bringing up the concerns about these fees and the devastating effect they will have on inland communities along the St. Lawrence.

Could he elaborate a bit more about what happens in communities like Sept Îles, Quebec City, Montreal and Rimouski, as a result of these fees and lack of services on top of that? Those communities pay federal taxes to have the Coast Guard in effect operating as it should. Then on top of that they have to pay additional fees for the service. Could he elaborate a bit more on the concerns that the communities and businesses have, in his particular riding and those along the Quebec shore?

Government Orders

• (2155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chairman, I thank my colleague for the question. He is absolutely right. I said that just a few minutes ago. The economic impact on local communities is considerable.

For the stretch of the St. Lawrence between Montreal and the upstream tip of Île d'Orléans, for example, there are dredging fees charged according to gross tonnage, at the rate of \$0.0345 per tonne each trip. Obviously, the net effect of these charges is that any ships headed for the United States avoid as far as possible putting in at the various Quebec and Canadian ports along the St. Lawrence, in order to avoid paying these fees. As I have already said, this has negative effects on the local communities. Traffic decreases and fewer ships berth in their community. This leads to lay-offs and to indirect economic spinoffs that have a negative impact on the various suppliers to the port facilities. The impact is, therefore, a heavy one.

I believe my colleague has also pointed out that, despite the fact that the shipping companies, and the people of Quebec pay taxes to Ottawa, they have to pay the fees imposed by the Coast Guard in addition. And what services are provided in return? I have already said, the services provided by the Coast Guard are constantly decreasing in number, and so there are fewer and fewer vessel-trips. The effect of this, as I have also pointed out—one more negative effect—is that there is less monitoring of the cruising speed of vessels on the St. Lawrence. As a result, they are going faster. Obviously, they want to get to the U.S. ports as quickly as possible, so they increase their speed. This leads to erosion of the shores of the St. Lawrence.

As for the government's decision, it would appear they want to continue with it. I would like to see them come to the realization that this has had negative effects on the communities along the St. Lawrence and it is high time these fees were eliminated.

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, first, I want to congratulate the hon. member on how he presented his arguments. All these issues were raised on a number of occasions by the industry.

However, as regards certain issues raised in the debate—and I am not taking sides—I would like to ask the hon. member to consider the following points.

He mentioned the issue of competitiveness. He said that there could be a smaller number of users because of the costs. I am not sure that this is true. If it is the case, I am sure that it is not good from a competition point of view. If there are some users of services who have to pay for costs and others who do not, this would normally have an impact on competition.

There is also the issue of users. Users pay reasonable costs. Would the hon. member agree with this type of costs charged to users, if we can find a way, through negotiations and discussions with the industry, to impose reasonable costs that could be negotiated?

There are currently representations being made in this regard. As to whether or not they will be successful, it is too early to tell. I invite the hon. member to reflect on this.

The other issue raised by his colleague earlier has to do with asking us—and this is a request from all sides—to find additional resources for the Coast Guard. This would produce another shortfall. Did the hon. member take that into consideration?

We can always say that we will find money elsewhere, but sometimes it is harder than it seems. As the hon. member for Egmont pointed out, there is the issue of health care, the issue of the military, the issues relating to the environment and the other pressures that the government has to deal with.

I will stop here and ask the hon. member to comment.

• (2200)

The Speaker: I would ask the member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes to give a short answer.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chairman, the answer will be as short as the question.

First, I would like to thank the minister for his question and to congratulate him on his work. I think that he, as much as we tonight, earnestly wishes that the resources provided to the Coast Guard could be increased.

I believe that there is no doubt whatsoever that the fees that have been charged by the Coast Guard over the past number of years have had a major impact on the reduction of traffic in the St. Lawrence and a major impact on the reduction of the number of stopovers in Quebec ports.

To answer his questions, I would simply say that, yes, it is important to find the resources required for the Coast Guard. I wonder about the fact that, in this period of budgetary surplus, we act as though we were in a period of budgetary restraints, as was the case at the beginning of the Liberal regime. We still get the impression that we have to cut to the bone, when we have the resources to ensure that the government can carry out its mandate, which is to provide a number of services, particularly with respect to transportation corridors.

If we must ultimately resign ourselves to charging fees for icebreaking, navigational aids and marine services, I would like them to be charged to the Canadian marine industry as a whole, and not simply to the marine industry in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and in the St. Lawrence.

[*English*]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, it is a pleasure to join in the debate this evening. My initial thought was to deliver my speech from my seat at the far reaches of the House. Being an elected official from the east coast of Canada, and probably there are very few in the House who represent constituents from as far east in the country as I do, I am quite comfortable with taking that perspective from the far reach.

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I find it is the greatest challenge coming to Ottawa because the people, the bureaucrats and the decision makers in Ottawa believe that this is the norm of the country. One of the greatest challenges we have in coming from the regions is bringing our stories to the nation's capital and working on behalf of the people who make up such an integral part of our country's mosaic.

It is a great pleasure to take part in the debate this evening and add to what the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has said already about the Canadian Coast Guard.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, I too greatly appreciate the fine work this great institution does 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. This record of success speaks for itself.

I also appreciate the important role of the Canadian Coast Guard in the everyday lives of coastal and northern communities. As I stated, like the minister, I too come from a coastal community. I know the people of Bras d'Or—Cape Breton and, indeed, all coastal communities, place great value in the Coast Guard's strong presence and the service this key Canadian institution provides.

While it is certainly true that there have been funding challenges in recent years, the Canadian Coast Guard has done much to continue providing the highest calibre of service to those who rely on it. It is no easy task, but the truth of the matter is that to have funding in place for any and every marine incident that may arise, is totally unrealistic. Governments everywhere understand that it is impossible to fund every what-if scenario. However, we still have a top-notch, marine response capability that is second to none in the world. We have comprehensive contingency plans and a team of highly skilled men and women ready and able to deal with marine emergencies.

Let me assure hon. members that funding challenges or not the Canadian Coast Guard remains committed to ensuring that public safety is not compromised. This evening I would like to outline some of the steps the Canadian Coast Guard has taken not only to continue providing its excellent service in the face of funding challenges, but also to strengthen these services and make them as efficient and cost effective as possible in years to come.

Perhaps the most obvious evolution in the Coast Guard's work is technology. As hon. members know, the range and accuracy of marine and navigational technology growth in recent years is truly staggering. The Canadian Coast Guard has a long tradition for embracing technological innovation. It is a tradition that continues today. Through its use of new navigational technology, like the Differential Global Positioning System or DGPS and INNAV and its exploration of emerging technology like the automatic identification system, AIS, the Canadian Coast Guard is finding new ways to improve marine security and the level of vessel safety on Canadian waters.

In fact, the Canadian Coast Guard has become a leader in finding the most innovative ways to use this technology. This leadership was recently acknowledged when the Coast Guard received a number of awards for advancing the use of modern marine technology to reduce environmental impacts on our oceans.

Technological advances like these mean change and the Coast Guard can also become a leader in finding the most innovative ways

in to adapt its services to fully benefit from this technological change. The organization is implementing new cost effective business practices and life cycle materiel management to ensure that equipment is not only high performance but also requires less maintenance. This approach also means finding more ways for the Coast Guard to work with its partners to increase operational efficiency and cost effectiveness without compromising marine safety.

Oil spill preparedness and response is one example. While the Canadian Coast Guard remains the lead agency in this area and maintains its own federal response capacity for spills north of 60° north latitude, the organization has worked closely with its partners in the private sector to find ways for industry to clean up its own spills.

• (2205)

This innovative regime was established in 1995 to enable industry to respond to its own oil spills of up to 10,000 tonnes within prescribed time standards and operating environments. Under this regime, designated oil handling facilities and all ships of a certain size are required to have an arrangement with the Canadian Coast Guard certified response organization, or RO, which can respond in the event of a pollution incident.

For its part, the Canadian Coast Guard sets the standards by which these organizations are certified, ensures their continuing compliance with those standards and closely monitors response operations. This is one area in which the Coast Guard has found an innovative way to work with its partners to increase efficiency and cost effectiveness.

The Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary is another good example. The volunteer based auxiliary was formed in 1978 in order to enhance search and rescue coverage and capability and to better coordinate volunteer efforts. The organization has been saving lives ever since. Today its 5,000-plus members are dedicated to search and rescue and to safe boating activities. Auxiliary members are primarily pleasure craft operators and commercial fishermen who use their own vessels or community owned vessels for search and rescue operations and safe boating activities.

Last year the auxiliary responded to over 2,000 search and rescue taskings, or 20% of all our maritime search and rescue incidents across Canada. They also conducted over 3,200 pleasure craft courtesy checks and participated in nearly 1,200 training exercises. Their local knowledge, maritime experience, seafaring talents and professional conduct make them another good example of how the Canadian Coast Guard is finding ways to work with its partners to continue providing the most cost effective delivery of key Coast Guard services.

These are just a few examples of how the Canadian Coast Guard is making the most of what it has and what its partners have to offer in continuing to give Canadians the high level of service they have come to expect.

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But the fact remains that funding is a lingering issue. As the minister indicated earlier, the Canadian Coast Guard's fleet capital needs exceed available funds. Therefore, fleet recapitalization is a high priority for DFO, but to say that the Canadian Coast Guard has no new vessels is totally misleading. Earlier the minister mentioned the investment of \$115 million, over three years, to our search and rescue program, in 2000. He mentioned the 31 new lifeboats, 7 of which have been built, with 24 more contracted for construction.

In addition, the Canadian Coast Guard has worked hard to ensure the most effective match between the types of Coast Guard vessels available and the jobs they have to do. Through the base fleet review, the Canadian Coast Guard found a number of ways to improve the operational efficiency and cost effectiveness of their vessels, and new life cycle management practices are being put into place to better manage and maintain the fleet.

At the end of the day, the Canadian Coast Guard is fully aware that vessels cannot last forever, especially in their harsh operating environments. That is why, as the minister mentioned, fleet recapitalization remains a high priority for DFO and for the minister himself.

While the department puts its case together, let me add my voice to the minister's in assuring the House that public safety is at the heart of the Coast Guard's commitment to Canadians. The Canadian Coast Guard stands ready and able to respond to a wide range of marine safety needs of Canadians. Sometimes it means shifting resources from one place to another, like the Canadian Coast Guard did during the Saguenay floods. Sometimes it means having a contingency plan to deal with any eventuality. But in any case, Canadians can rest assured that these types of incidents will be responded to by the Canadian Coast Guard in the professional and capable manner for which this organization is world renowned.

• (2210)

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Chairman, I want to thank my friend for his speech. Earlier when it was asked if the minister would take some additional questions, my friend thought it was not a good idea, so I want to ask him a question that I had for the minister. Given the nature of his speech, he should be able to address this question anyway because it has to do with the provision of vessels for the Coast Guard.

Earlier today, as my friend knows, I asked the minister about the replacement hovercraft that is being looked at for the Pacific region, in particular, Sea Island. There is some concern about the performance requirements for that.

I have in my hand a May 2000 briefing note for senior management which suggests that in 1993, in recognition of the advanced age of the three SR-N6 type hovercraft we had, the construction of two AP1-88 hovercraft was requested in order to provide replacements for these three. I will note that in 1993 we did have three hovercraft based at Sea Island but we are down to one now.

We know that we did not get them, but we know that we now are looking at one in Britain. The one in Britain actually served as a passenger ferry and I guess the minister has the idea of converting it to search and rescue use. The government, in examining this hovercraft in Britain, suggests that the hovercraft be capable of

operating at 2.4 metre waves or in 35-40 knot winds. The performance requirements in this May 2000 briefing note suggest that the hovercraft should be able to operate in wind conditions of up to 50 knots and in sea states of up to 4 metres.

There is a fair contrast between the bar that the government has set for this hovercraft that it is looking at in Britain and the performance standards that were set in this senior management briefing note. I would like to ask my friend if he could comment on that and enlighten us as to why the performance has been lowered, why the bar has been lowered for this potential acquisition.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Chairman, I thank my colleague for that question and for saving it for me in the absence of the minister.

Members of the fisheries and oceans standing committee had the great pleasure last year of travelling to the west coast where we had the opportunity to go to the search and rescue base just outside Vancouver airport. The first thing that had an impact on me was the staff there. I know the feeling is unanimous among all members taking part in the debate tonight in regard to the commitment, the ability and the professionalism of the people who are employed by the Coast Guard.

While we were there we had the opportunity to go out on the hovercraft vessel, *Siyay*, located at the base. The Coast Guard had an opportunity to show us the capabilities of the craft and it certainly was an impressive display. At the same time we saw the backup vehicle that was soon to be a surplus vehicle because of a certain state of disrepair. It was shared with the committee that there was a great deal of concern about the acquisition of a second backup vessel.

Since then, the Coast Guard has embarked on a procurement exercise. Senior officials have indicated that the vessel they are soon to take ownership of and which will soon become operational will satisfy their short term needs as a backup vessel. I understand that the Coast Guard's long range plans are to acquire a second hovercraft vessel similar to the *Siyay*, which would give it full capability and full capacity. This is long range and I guess we just cannot do it all overnight. Decisions have to be made through procurement, and the recapitalization program is vital.

As we are looking at the boats being built, I made reference in my speech to the lifeboats, those that have been secured already as well as the ones contracted to be built. I might add that these boats are being built in Canadian boatyards in B.C., resulting in jobs and additional benefits going to the people of B.C. and to Canadians.

Tough decisions have to be made with those procurement decisions. I am confident and senior Coast Guard officials believe that this interim measure of securing this hovercraft will at least serve as a backup until we can secure a vessel like the *Siyay* as a permanent backup.

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• (2215)

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Chairman, as we get toward the end of the debate tonight I would be remiss not to recognize the fact that the minister has stayed here all night. We appreciate that. I think it also shows his interest in what is going on. As well, we do have the brass as it relates to fisheries here. The parliamentary secretary also has stayed with us, along with the new chair of the committee. We look forward to working closely with him.

An hon. member: It's pretty top-heavy over there.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: And the member who just spoke is the vice-chair.

Let me say too that as we went through the early stages of this debate, I am sure a lot of people listening across the country wondered if all the opposition does is complain and exaggerate, but I was extremely pleased when the new chair of the fisheries committee, a Liberal member, stood up and repeated every concern that we raised tonight. We appreciate that, because people can see that this is not a partisan effort. It is an effort of concern to try to highlight the needs within the Coast Guard.

I have something to ask the member who just spoke, seeing that he told about all the good things that are happening in the Coast Guard. And we have no doubt about that. We have never argued the fact that a lot of good things are happening. But the member was in British Columbia with us last year. We shared the same taxi to the hotel, if he remembers, all the way from the airport to hotel, but I will not tell about that. It took us about 30 seconds.

He saw at first hand, as the rest of us did, the state of the Coast Guard stations spread across the Vancouver coast. When he talks about all the lifeboats being built in British Columbia, I will say to him that a lot of them could have been built more cheaply in Newfoundland if the rules were not the way they are. I will also say that I hope we do not have to wait as long to get the rest of the boats as we have had to wait for the helicopters. All in all, despite the fact that we agree with the good things, does he not agree that the concerns raised by his new chair, his Liberal colleague, and the rest of us are very legitimate?

• (2220)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Chairman, to reiterate my colleague's comments, I agree too. It has been a great pleasure to work with the fisheries and oceans committee in the last year and a half. I think the partisan attitude is most times set aside to deal with the real issues.

In acknowledging the capability of our newly elected chair, one thing all members can unite behind is that he has the ability and has proven that ability to see through the fog, get to the crux of an issue and to not accept the answers from bureaucrats but to challenge them.

I am sure my colleague on the other side, as he stands on the wharf and speaks to fishermen and fishermen groups, the line that continues to come back all the time is that they are not getting their message to DFO and that DFO officials are not listening to them. There seems to be a problem with getting through to some DFO officials.

I was as taken aback as the committee was with the response of the individual in Vancouver who said that the department had enough money to address any concerns, and then going out into the department and finding there were a number of shortcomings and concerns. I think it is imperative that senior management have the vehicles and tools in place that allow this information to be shared so we are prepared when it comes budgeting time.

I think this is a fruitful and beneficial exercise that we are taking part in this evening to bring forward the importance of secure and maybe increased funding to our Coast Guard. I wish the minister all the best in his deliberations with cabinet.

The Speaker: I know there are lots of other questions but I am afraid the 10 minutes for questions and comments on the hon. member's speech have expired.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chairman, I rise on a point of order. Would my colleagues give their unanimous consent to my asking a question to the previous speaker?

[*English*]

The Speaker: I am sure this is very tempting.

[*Translation*]

However, there is a problem, because I may not ask the unanimous consent of the House during a take note debate. This is part of the Standing Orders. I cannot even submit such a request to the House, unfortunately.

Obviously the minister has the opportunity to spare the member certain questions, as the member spared the minister. It was mentioned earlier.

[*English*]

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Chairman, I wish I could approach this take note debate with a light heart but I am afraid I cannot do that.

There needs to be an inquiry into the destruction of the Canadian Coast Guard since it was absorbed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and it is a sad tale indeed. One cannot live on the British Columbia coast without becoming aware of what is happening to what was a very proud service.

I am a former member of the fisheries committee. I have worked with most of the members who have spoken tonight. I think they are quite in tune that when it comes to marine issues, I am fairly up to speed.

What is happening with our Coast Guard, albeit that it is much smaller than the Department of National Defence, is similar from the standpoint that it is underfunded, suffering from rust out and is somewhat lacking in leadership at some critical positions.

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Why is it, I keep asking myself, that our most valued services, the ones that the people believe are central to the goal of their federal government, are always the ones that get the short end of the stick? If we look at budget reductions to the Canadian Coast Guard since 1995, it has lost \$100 million. Those are non-inflated dollars, which means a drop from \$542 million to \$442 million. There is a very significant drop in coast guard figures. Those are from public accounts.

Why is it that every time I make a speech in British Columbia and talk about the Coast Guard and say that it is time to take it out of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and either stand it on its own or put it in with the armed forces, of all outfits, I get an immediate, spontaneous ovation? It is ironic, given the public concerns that are also apparent about the chronic underfunding of the Department of National Defence. Still, with all that baggage, they would prefer to see that rather than what is happening with the Coast Guard before their very eyes.

We know that in order to maintain our asset base we need to reinvest. The Canadian Coast Guard commissioner himself has said that requires about \$140 million to \$150 million of capital funding each year. In contrast, over the last 10 years the average has been in the order of \$30 million or \$40 million.

An audit was done by the Auditor General and the December 2000 report was considered by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The central conclusion arising from the audit was that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans was not managing its fleet in a cost effective way. Almost all the elements that would discourage good management and functional accountability in any organization are to be found in the Canadian Coast Guard.

We have a problem. Here is just a symptom. I like real life examples. We have the Canadian Coast Guard with its director of operational services saying to his commanding officers of coast guard ships, "I have some concerns with regard to keeping the regional fleet on budget on the operating and maintenance fuel allotment side. In light of this I am requesting that you take extra measures to reduce fuel consumption. They are short of dollars. I am aware that commanding officers are already taking steps to conserve fuel, such as reducing speed and operating on fewer engines where possible. However, as of today's date, September 26 of this year, I am directing commanding officers to reduce discretionary steaming to a bare minimum".

• (2225)

This is the kind of thing that is going on with our once proud services. They have been reduced to beggars and to second tier in DFO ranks. Basically the feeling among Coast Guard personnel is that all DFO wanted was their budget. DFO in the meantime has lost its moral right to manage the fishery. At the same time it has lost its moral right to carry out the search and rescue function.

We had protests from the commercial fishermen this summer who, as a direct consequence, thought that their livelihood was at stake. After years of being treated poorly by DFO they saw that this was the year they had to take a position.

We have the ongoing saga of an aboriginal fishery pilot sales program that has been found wanting for statutory authority which

the minister continues to operate to the point where he was turning a blind eye to openings this summer rather than announce them simply because it was another way to circumvent his problem rather than deal with the real issue.

In terms of the search and rescue function being completely turned on its head, we have two prime examples of where this has been completely mismanaged on the west coast. We have the example of the hovercraft which has been well explained. This is unconscionable.

The Vancouver Airport Authority emergency plan requires two hovercraft. We have one hovercraft. We do not know when the other one will be delivered. Every hovercraft has to be taken out of operation for servicing. When that happens there will be no coverage for the Vancouver airport or for the flats. If there is an accident out there, a major loss of life could be involved.

The other example is with the Coast Guard rescue divers. I want to review that from my perspective. The ministerial actions in terms of the lead-up to the *Cap Rouge II* disaster have led to what I consider an incomprehensible cop-out by the minister in terms of accepting responsibility for a very serious tragedy.

We had loss of life which led the previous minister to cancel the Coast Guard rescue diving program on the west coast and turn it over to the armed forces. In February 2001, I warned the minister in the House of Commons that this was not a good move. I said:

it will not work to drop the coast guard rescue diving in the Vancouver area and substitute the Department of DND from Comox or Esquimalt on Vancouver Island to do the rescue diving.

The Vancouver coast guard rescue diving program record over the last six years demonstrates that the vast majority of calls were responded to within 20 minutes. For example, mobilization and flight time for DND from Comox is one and a half hours and it is worse on nights and weekends. The minister is saying that these are equivalent services when they are so obviously not.

That is the crux of the matter. After the *Cap Rouge II* the opposition was accused of federal opportunism to be critical of the west coast search and rescue capability. I find that quite unconscionable.

• (2230)

Rather than the minister accepting responsibility for the lack of direction that the divers were under when they had previously been told that they could not do these dives, it has led those divers into a no win situation. What does a diver do when the media and everyone are second guessing the next incident? This is life threatening for them.

I will conclude with that because I am getting the time sign. I certainly would have a lot more to say if I had the time.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Chairman, there are two issues I would like my friend to comment on. What we are talking about this evening is the drastic underfunding of an essential service. I have documents which I received through access to information that tell me quite clearly that the Siyay hovercraft is the only reliable SAR resource on the mud flats at the airport and we cannot afford to take these kinds of risks.

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What he is talking about is using the hovercraft for what normally would be routine services. They talk, for example, about using it for navigational purposes and assistance on navigational buoys and that kind of thing. There was a request from Canada Customs to use it and it was told no, the hovercraft cannot be used for these activities because it is the only reliable search and rescue resource there is and the chance cannot be taken of using it on the mud flats off the Vancouver airport.

There is a serious bit of underfunding with the failure to provide an adequate backup for the Siyay. What is the reason for the underfunding? We have talked a bit about that.

This is the second point I would like to make. When we talk about money we have to talk about where it goes. If we look at DFO press releases this year, more than half that have been put out by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans announce money spent in Liberal ridings for small craft harbours, more than half of the DFO press releases. On one hand there is a serious gap in our ability to provide search and rescue and on the other hand there is a lot of money going into some perhaps questionable projects.

I wonder if my friend would care to comment on that.

● (2235)

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Chairman, first of all, good governance involves setting priorities. I cannot see that there is a much higher priority than the safety of our citizens and people who are travelling to visit our nation.

What is happening with the lack of hovercraft coverage at Vancouver airport is unconscionable. We knew there was a plan to retire the second hovercraft. We knew what the retirement date was and at the same time we knew that the second hovercraft was still not basically secured. It is still not basically secured to this day.

In terms of why the Coast Guard is not doing well under the new regime since it was moved from the Department of Transport to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is simply a function of what happens when there is a merger. Often there is a winner and a loser. I have seen it happen in the corporate world. What has happened with the Coast Guard is it has lost.

We have a situation where the senior Coast Guard personnel are junior in the DFO hierarchy and simply cannot put their stamp on the priority that they deserve within the larger organization. They have lost the power and influence game. It is up to the minister and political masters to effect change which will bring sensibility back and put public priorities in the right order.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chairman, I agree with my hon. colleague from Vancouver Island North that an inquiry into DFO and its management is definitely required, as is a discussion and a serious look at the merger of the Coast Guard into DFO. He is right. When it comes to winners and losers, from our perspective we believe that the Coast Guard was the one that lost on the merger.

He well knows of incidents that happened when Brian Tobin was the premier of Newfoundland and Labrador and used a Coast Guard vessel as a personal pleasure craft, with his cabinet, to take a little swing around St. Anthony in Labrador. He also knows of an incident

that happened in St. John's harbour when Coast Guard officials used a Coast Guard vessel for a little wine and cheese party one evening.

The fact is this was at the time when the member for Egmont was saying that the government had to make cuts to balance the books. While the government was cutting, cutting, cutting, influential people in Newfoundland and in the Coast Guard were using valuable vessels as their pleasure crafts. It is unconscionable that they would do that and think they could get away with it when the men and women of the Coast Guard are scratching for every dollar they can get in order to do their jobs.

My hon. colleague from Delta—South Richmond indicated a very serious concern about the government actually not abiding by its current regulations that it has and downsizing requirements to make the purchase of a hovercraft when it will not meet the needs of its own regulations. I would like him to comment more on that. I find it unconscionable that there are regulations in May 2000 which state what is needed and then the government turns around and, because it wants to get a vessel that does not even meet those requirements, it lowers the standards.

When it comes to safety, we should not second guess. We should be following the regulations to the maximum in order to have maximum coverage in the event of a serious emergency. I would like my colleague to comment on that please.

● (2240)

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Chairman, I do not quite know where to begin to respond to that. I do agree that we need a lot more than a take note debate on this issue. We need an inquiry into the functioning and effectiveness of the Coast Guard. We have now had this circumstance for a number of years. Basically from all reports it is not working.

We have had simple things. For the Office of Boating Safety, for example, there is new legislation. Legislation was created where everybody who runs a recreational craft under four metres in length is supposed to be licensed as of September 15.

I live in a part of the country where everybody has a boat and many of them are under four metres in length. What are the audits saying? That the Office of Boating Safety endeavour to operate in basically an unfunded state with few to nil resources. That is no surprise.

The local newspaper stated: "Efforts by *The Record* to obtain information where local boaters can take this test proved futile. The operator of the local office of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans was not available so a call was placed to the Campbell River DFO office. In turn, we were referred to the boating safety hotline, who in turn referred us to a media consultant in Vancouver. This person told us we should be calling the Boating Safety Office in Victoria. Upon calling that number we found there was no one available. A call back to the boating safety hotline to ask for further assistance had us referred to the directory for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. There was no one answering that telephone either".

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This is the kind of behaviour we are getting. We are getting new initiatives that are not funded. We are getting priority activities of the department that are basically being underfunded.

The same thing is happening to the Coast Guard that is happening to our armed forces. It is rust out, it is burnout and it is time that the government made a decision that those are priority activities that it must deliver. It has a constitutional priority to deliver those kinds of programs to the public. It is not happening to the degree it should.

The minister is the one who is responsible to try and effect this change. I hope and wish him well in those endeavours.

Mr. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, my speech will be very short but as you know, any time there is a debate on resources, I always have to talk about my riding and make sure that we are not forgotten or left out as occurs sometimes.

We have one application for the Coast Guard, as people are asking for more resources. As a result of global warming, the northwest passage is opening up. It is predicted it might be completely open by 2010. This is causing a security problem for Canada. Members probably have heard the three northern MPs speak about it before in relation to national defence. The Coast Guard also has a role.

The passage is opening and now there are ships coming in, various vessels from around the world, sometimes without surveillance. Sometimes they get through without being seen because of course it was all ice and we had no patrols there before. It is very important for a number of reasons that we adjust rapidly to this situation. Unfortunately for certain departments this will require more resources.

The problem is that when ships come in from other countries, they can bring things in their ballasts that will hurt our environment. They can bring illegal immigrants. They can smuggle things in. There have been a number of stories already of how they just pull up to shore and have never been questioned by anybody. They are hurting our environment. They can dump oil.

Most important for our sovereignty, there are countries in the world that do not consider the northern archipelago to be a part of Canada. We see maps of the United States and they do not necessarily see that that is our nation and our land. It is very important for patrols to be a presence to manifest our sovereignty there.

Any time we have any activity, whether it is a Coast Guard vessel or whether it is a just a building where they get supplies, a National Defence presence, a supply depot or a small northern community, it helps show our sovereignty in the area. It makes sure that a very important, huge piece of land, as big as Europe, and all its rich resources, will remain part of Canada.

The Coast Guard is only one piece in this puzzle. There are many players that have important parts. I am sure my colleagues have mentioned the Aurora flights. People have mentioned the National Defence boats. There are also the rangers. I am happy that defence has increased the resources for that. The northern rangers and the northern junior rangers are indigenous people. They are out on the land and sometimes they see things and can report them back to the system, but they are not always on the water where the problems might be.

The Coast Guard, which operates up in that area primarily for safety reasons, does have a role. There is not a simple answer. It is not one person's responsibility. Everyone in an area of scarce resources and thousands and thousands of kilometres of land has to work together and have a system of reporting to each other. The military has to have a good presence. The local indigenous people have to have a good presence, training and contacts where they can report things. Of course the Coast Guard has to play an important role there too.

I hope that my colleagues will be sensitive to the need for the Coast Guard in the north and the valuable role it plays there, and the more and more open water on which it needs to play that role.

• (2245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Chairman, since we are nearing the end of the debate, before I ask my question, I would like to thank my colleagues for taking part in this debate. It was a most interesting debate. I would also like to thank the minister for his presence.

I would like to reassure my colleague from Yukon that throughout this debate, we have been very conscious of the state of the Coast Guard in his region. What all of us here want, and I hope he agrees with us, is to ensure that the Coast Guard really is able to respond to the what the government is asking it to do. In other words, a lot is being asked of the Canadian Coast Guard right now, and it is not being given much when it comes to its means.

Furthermore, and this is important, as I said during the debate, it has become a collector of taxes for the government. I do not believe this is its role.

I would like it if my colleague could tell me if he agrees with us that we must, as much as possible—obviously one has to take into account the fact that everyone has their priorities—increase funding to the Coast Guard to ensure that it fulfills the mission it has been given, and that this organization can someday function under reasonable conditions, which is not the case right now.

• (2250)

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Chairman, I can only speak about my own region which is very small, but I would agree that more resources need to be provided to that region. Unfortunately, I cannot speak to the big picture because I am just not that familiar with it.

As this debate comes to a close, I would like to provide a short message to the minister's staff and departmental officials, who I hope are watching, on the intent of these debates. We get positive ideas from all sides of the House in these debates. It is very important, if they are going to be useful, that the staff and officials make a compendium of them, go through them, look for good ideas and make a summary for the minister.

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I was at a good one of these not long ago. The departmental staff did an excellent job of summarizing the whole exercise. It was provided for the minister and whoever was interested. That shows the real function of these and that they are listening to people from all parties. That is the function of a debate like this. We are here to help the country and to provide good ideas, and I know that especially the opposition wants to ensure that it is being heard. I encourage the staff to do that because I think it helps make this a very positive exercise.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Chairman, I thank the member for Yukon and his speech pointing out the importance of the Canadian Coast Guard in the north in terms of military presence, ice breaking, support to communities and to commerce as well as to science. In a lot of the research that is done, the Coast Guard serves as a platform. It is very important in highlighting our national sovereignty as well as to us having a better understanding of global warming, the effect of pollutants on the north, lifestyles of the people and their future.

I want to finish by pointing out my great appreciation to all members on both sides of the House for the calibre and tone of the discussions tonight. We do not always agree with one another. I take exception to some of the things that were said and undoubtedly all the members opposite take exception to some of the things that I or my colleagues said. It was all said in good faith. The intention is all the same, to maintain a high level of service, improve it where it should be and give the service to the people of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chairman, through you, I want to thank all of the members for the serious and positive tone of tonight's debate and their excellent cooperation. I do hope that we will all have the opportunity to serve a long time in the House of Commons and to have many more such interesting debates in the future.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Chairman, I thank the minister for his kind words. The debate was certainly civilized and informative in many respects.

I too wish to thank my colleague from the Yukon for his remarks. I know that we are both members whose ridings are along shores, but

very different shores. We had the opportunity to work together on the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, and I know that, for him, the issue of shoreline erosion along the St. Lawrence River is not one of the obvious concerns.

To illustrate my remarks if I may, I would submit to him that, somewhat fed up of seeing his property gradually chipped away, one of my fellow citizens purchased a radar to clock the speed of ships on the St. Lawrence River. He reported to me that, on June 17, a ship named *JAC* sailed by his place, in Contrecoeur, at a speed of 17.05 knots, while the limit on the river is 11 knots.

Would my colleague, the hon. member for the Yukon, not agree, based on the comments made by Jacques Desrosiers, of Contrecoeur, that monitoring on the St. Lawrence has been on the decline because of the Coast Guard's dwindling resources, with the result that ships' speed has increased, causing further damage in terms of shoreline erosion?

• (2255)

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Chairman, there is not as much difference as one might think between Yukon and the St. Lawrence River. We have a boat that goes from Dawson City to Eagle, Alaska. There are a lot of complaints about shoreline erosion. I can definitely sympathize with the member about the effect that this has on fish.

I express my appreciation to all members and the minister for staying for the entire debate. Quite often we have had these debates and the minister, who could do something about the good wisdom that comes from all parties, has not been here. It is very honourable that the minister has been here for the whole debate and I thank him on behalf of us all.

The Speaker: It being 10:55 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 53 (1) the committee will rise and I will leave the chair.

The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 10:56 p.m.)

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