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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 13, 2003

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 13, 2003

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

• (1005)

[*English*]

PRIVILEGE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I am thankful for this opportunity to add some points on a matter that was raised as a question of privilege by the chair of the public accounts committee on Monday, February 10.

At that time allegations were made that I may have committed a breach of privilege as a member of Parliament or be in contempt of Parliament for releasing information regarding a draft report being dealt with by the public accounts committee on the subject of the Groupaction sponsorship scandals.

I should point out that this allegation has more to do with my position as the critic of the official opposition than it does any breach of privilege as a member of Parliament in the House.

I will point out that clearly someone did release information about the draft report being dealt with by the public accounts committee because on January 31 the *National Post* wrote quite a comprehensive article about the contents of this draft report in great detail. We believe that someone did release a copy of that draft report to the *National Post*. I want to say categorically here and now, that person was not me.

Further, information that was written in the *National Post* was picked up by other subsequent newspapers. I would argue that once it was printed in the *National Post* it became part of the public domain. Other newspapers that were in fact part of the same media chain and own the *National Post* started to use information that was printed first in the *National Post*. I did not believe that any comments made by me about the article in the *National Post* breached parliamentary privilege.

I am very aware of the rules of the House of Commons. Every day that I take my seat in the House of Commons I am very aware of the honour that is mine to be a member of Parliament and I would never knowingly contravene the rules of the House of Commons.

Having said that, I would like to add that one of the points raised by the chair of the public accounts committee in his criticism of me

had some merit in that I did schedule a news conference for Monday, February 10, where I planned to speak about some of the issues surrounding the Groupaction affair. Some of those issues were in the *National Post* already. When it was brought to my attention that holding a news conference to talk about those topics would in fact be crossing that line the news conference was cancelled. It never took place. I do not believe that anything that I have done or said subsequent to that day in any way breaches parliamentary privilege.

I am glad to have this opportunity to express my opinion and clear that up. I believe the issue is more a matter of the concentration of ownership in the media, where when one newspaper gets a story its fellow newspapers in that chain often comment on the same thing. Someone leaked that draft report and I share the concern of the chair of the public accounts committee that it was wrong. That person was not me. With that, I thank the House for its time.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre for his clarification of the events that we heard about on Monday at some length. The Chair took the matter under advisement then. It is still under advisement and I will get back to the House in due course.

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE NON-MEDICAL USE OF DRUGS—SPEAKER'S RULING.

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve on December 12, 2002, concerning the premature disclosure of the report of the Special committee on the Non-Medical Use of Drugs.

I should explain that the unusual delay in returning to the House in this case is due to the adjournment and is a result of the Chair waiting to give an opportunity to all members involved to intervene on the question.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve for having raised this matter as well as the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie, the hon. opposition House leader, the hon. member for Langley-Abbotsford and the hon. member for Laval East for their contributions.

The hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve claimed that newspaper reports published prior to the tabling of the Special Committee's final report on December 12, 2002, revealed premature disclosure of parts of the report dealing with the committee's recommendations related to the decriminalization of marijuana. He alleged that the premature release of information could be traced to the hon. members for Laval East and the hon. member for Langley—Abbotsford.

Speaker's Ruling

As the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve rightly noted, this is contrary to our practices and is a breach of the privileges of the House and of all members and, as he went on to point out, past Speakers' rulings have consistently indicated the need to include the source of the leak in raising any charge of this nature.

[English]

House of Commons Procedure and Practice sets this out clearly on pages 884 to 885:

Speakers have ruled that questions of privilege concerning leaked reports will not be considered unless a specific charge is made against an individual, organization or group, and that the charge must be levelled not only against those outside the House who have made *in camera* material public, but must also identify the source of the leak within the House itself.

The hon. member for Langley—Abbotsford acknowledged that he had discussed the topic of decriminalization in the media, but contended that he had not done so in the context of the special committee's report. He stated that the topic of decriminalization is one that has generated considerable public interest in recent months and that his remarks were directed at the position of the government made public by the Minister of Justice.

[Translation]

The hon. opposition House leader, citing *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, p. 128-9, argued that our practice has clearly been to have such questions dealt with first by the committee concerned so that the House is seized with the question of a leak only upon receiving a report from a committee raising that issue.

[English]

I will deal with his latter point first. While it is true that committees are masters of their own proceedings and have primary responsibility for dealing with their own questions of order, the situation is somewhat more complicated for a special committee. While a special committee, like any other committee of this House, should deal with procedural matters as they arise, it is unable to take the initiative in this regard once it has presented its final report.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice makes this quite clear at page 812, "Special committees cease to exist with the presentation of their final report".

•(1015)

[Translation]

So, while it is true in general that committees are responsible for their own procedural matters, in a case such as this, the only way in which a special committee can consider the question is by receiving an order from the House re-establishing it and empowering it to do so. Out of necessity, then, in this case, the matter must be considered here in the House.

I would like to say to the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve that I view this matter very seriously since the confidentiality of committee reports has been a constant source of concern to your Speaker and to the House itself. On that basis, I have examined all the press reports submitted to me with particular care. Taking them at their face value, it does appear that confidentiality has been breached with respect to the report of the Special Committee on the Non-Medical Use of Drugs. I know that all

hon. members will share my disappointment and frustration at such an occurrence

[English]

However, with respect to the charges levelled against the hon. members for Laval East and Langley—Abbotsford, the situation is somewhat different. In addition to the general interest in the subject of how marijuana is to be treated, there enters the further complicating factor that on December 10, 2002, the hon. Minister of Justice made statements concerning the government's position with respect to decriminalization.

I would further point out that there are many similarities between the views expressed by the minister and those contained in the committee's report.

[Translation]

My examination of the press reports shows that several members made comments concerning decriminalization of marijuana. None of these remarks actually quoted in the media constitutes a direct disclosure of the contents of the committee's report, nor do any of the stories allege that a member of the committee provided the information they contain

I am therefore not inclined to accept that these press reports can be accepted as *prima facie* evidence of the involvement of the hon. members for Laval East and Langley—Abbotsford in the premature disclosure of the Committee's report.

[English]

At the same time, as I have said, it appears that at least parts of the report were provided to the media prior to its tabling in the House. I would urge all hon. members to remember their responsibilities in this regard to their colleagues and to the House.

FIREARMS REGISTRY — SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville on February 5, 2003, concerning the reports tabled by the hon. Minister of Justice on Monday, February 3.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville for raising the issue, as well as the hon. government House leader and the hon. members for Vancouver East, St. John's West and Provencher for their contributions.

In presenting his case, the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville claimed that when the Minister of Justice tabled reports related to the administration of the firearms registry the minister withheld a part of the report. According to the hon. member, the part he alleges was withheld contained information vital to his ability to carry out his duties as a member of Parliament.

Charging the minister with deception, the hon. member further alleged that, in withholding information he knew to be essential, the minister failed to keep the commitment he made to the House on December 12, 2002. The hon. member concluded that, in so doing, the minister had acted in a manner that constituted a contempt of the House.

Points of Order

[Translation]

In response, the hon. government House leader cited Standing Order 32 (2), which states:

A Minister of the Crown, or a Parliamentary Secretary acting on behalf of a Minister, may, in his or her place in the House, state that he or she proposes to lay upon the Table of the House, any report or other paper dealing with a matter coming within the administrative responsibilities of the government, and, thereupon, the same shall be deemed for all purposes to have been laid before the House.

[English]

He pointed out that the Minister of Justice had voluntarily tabled the two reports laid before the House on February 3, contending that the minister could not then be faulted for not making available different information or a different report.

• (1020)

On this point, the hon. government House leader is quite correct. The *Journals* of February 3, 2003, at page 359 indicate that the Minister of Justice did indeed table the documents related to the firearms registry pursuant to this standing order.

The hon. government House leader also claimed that the additional document referred to by the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville was not in fact part of the report but a background document. The same claim was also made by the hon. Minister of Justice at page 3179 of *Debates*, when he characterized the document as one that had been provided to help prepare the report actually tabled.

I would point out to hon. members that there are only two conditions which oblige ministers to table documents. First, there are a great many documents that are tabled pursuant to statute or an order of this House. Marleau and Montpetit explains that one of the chief means by which the House obtains information is through the presentation of reports and returns stating at page 371:

In addition to the administrative documents that may be tabled in the House by Ministers, certain returns, reports and other papers are required to be laid before the House each year or session by statute, by order of the House, or by Standing Order. A number of statutes set forth the specific circumstances for tabling: for example, some statutes require Ministers to table annual reports of the departments, agencies and commissions which fall under their administrative responsibilities.

[Translation]

The second condition requiring the tabling of a document occurs when a document has been cited by a minister—that is, when a minister goes beyond referring to a document and actually quotes from the text.

Again I quote from Marleau and Montpetit, page 518:

Any document quoted by a Minister in debate or in response to a question during Question Period must be tabled. Indeed, a Minister is not at liberty to read or quote from a dispatch (an official written message on government affairs) or other state paper without being prepared to table it if it can be done without injury to the public interest.

[English]

In reviewing the facts of the case before us, it is clear that neither of the two documents tabled by the hon. minister on Monday, February 3, 2003, falls in a category of documents that require tabling. They were not required by statute or by order of the House, nor were they documents the minister had quoted from. As for the information under dispute, it is contained in an entirely separate third

document that provides technical background to the recommendations in one of the tabled reports.

The Minister of Justice was under no obligation to table any of these documents. However, following a commitment he made to the House on December 12, 2002, the minister chose to table the two reports and not the background document as, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), he sought to provide further information to members on matters that lie within his administrative jurisdiction as Minister of Justice.

That being said however, the Chair is troubled by the miscommunication which seems to exist in this case. Several hon. members indicated they were unaware of the existence of the background document despite the fact that the hon. government House leader stated that the document was available to members through several avenues.

It had been pointed out that the press release issued by the Department of Justice provided a phone number where members might request additional technical documents related to those tabled in the House. That may well be true, but it nonetheless left us in the unhappy situation where the House received one set of documents while a more complete set of materials was available outside the House. The Chair notes that this situation was rectified on February 12 when the Minister of Justice tabled the background document in the House.

Clearly, a disagreement exists between hon. members as to both the nature of the documents originally laid before the House by the hon. Minister of Justice and the extent of the commitment made by him in December when he agreed to provide further information on the firearms program. That distribution inside and outside the House was at the outset inconsistent—and, that the House arguably originally received the less complete set of documents—only exacerbated the disagreement.

However, the fact remains that no procedural obligation existed for the minister to table these documents in the first place. So, while it is certainly regrettable that the original distribution of documents was inconsistent, this in itself is not sufficient for the Chair to find that a prima facie question of privilege exists in this case.

I thank the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville for having drawn this matter to the attention of the Chair.

* * *

• (1025)

POINTS OF ORDER

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order regarding statements that were made in the House last week on February 6.

The allegation was made that I somehow was involved in the release of ministerial speaking notes regarding an announcement that the minister would be making on the morning of February 6.

Routine Proceedings

I have spoken to the minister and to the government House leader and have advised them that neither I nor my office were responsible for the leaking of those notes. In fact, my office was advised that morning that there would be a ministerial statement the next day but we were not given any indication as to what it would be about. At the same time there was a media advisory that suggested it would be about the dive team.

Nevertheless, not knowing, my office contacted people in the coast guard who advised us that the announcement would be about the dive team, and they made further inquiries relating to that instance.

I was not aware of the matter because I did not arrive in Ottawa until later that afternoon. When I was given a copy of the document, which I did read, I answered questions from a reporter later on in the day assuming he was aware of the incident.

However, I want to emphasize again that I did not release documents, nor did my office. I regret any upset that may have occurred over this matter. I assure the minister that in the future I will be even more cautious in my comments on matters such as this.

THE ROYAL ASSENT

[English]

The Speaker: Order, please. I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall
Ottawa

February 13, 2003

Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that the Honourable John Major, Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Canada, in his capacity as Deputy of the Governor General, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bill listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 13th day of February, 2003, at 8:50 a.m.

Yours sincerely,

Barbara Uteck
Secretary to the Governor General

The schedule indicates the bill assented to was Bill C-4, an act to amend the Nuclear Safety and Control Act—Chapter No. 1.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 12 petitions.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation to the Interparliamentary Forum of the Americas to the

sixth meeting of the executive committee in Panama City, Panama, December 6 and 7, 2002.

* * *

CANADIAN BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-360, an act to amend the Canadian Bill of Rights (right to education).

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

Mr. Mac Harb: Mr. Speaker, would it be possible to have unanimous consent to reintroduce a series of bills, 30 in total, with the exception of Bill C-390, an act to establish a national registry of medical devices, and Bill C-391, an act to establish a National Civil Defence Force, which I will introduce and speak to?

If I could have unanimous consent we would not have to go through those 30 bills one by one?

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Perhaps the Chair could dispense with reading the titles of the 30 bills?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Accordingly, leave to introduce the bills is deemed granted.

* * *

MODERNIZATION OF BENEFITS AND OBLIGATIONS ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-361, an act to amend the Modernization of Benefits and Obligations Act.

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

* * *

CANADIAN PEACEKEEPING SERVICE MEDAL ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-362, an act to amend the Canadian Peacekeeping Service Medal Act (Book of Remembrance for peacekeepers).

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

* * *

NATIONAL LITERACY STANDARDS ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-363, an act to establish national literacy standards across Canada.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-364, an act to amend the Canada Pension Plan.

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

* * *

ALTERNATE DISPUTE RESOLUTION ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-365, an act to provide for alternate dispute resolution.

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

* * *

DIVORCE ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-366, an act to amend the Divorce Act (right of spouses' parents to access to or custody of child).

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

* * *

DEPARTMENTAL INTERNAL AUDIT ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-367, an act to require Crown corporations and departments of government to have annual internal audits the reports of which are to be submitted to the Auditor General of Canada.

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

* * *

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-368, an act to provide for the harmonization of environmental standards throughout Canada.

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

* * *

CANADIAN CHILD RIGHTS ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-369, an act respecting the rights of children.

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-370, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for mental or physical impairment).

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-371, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (donations to food banks).

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-372, an act to amend the Criminal Code (defamatory libel).

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-373, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (deduction of funeral expenses).

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

* * *

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GUARANTEED ANNUAL INCOME ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-374, an act respecting the National Conference on Guaranteed Annual Income.

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

* * *

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-375, an act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act (school-leaving age).

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

* * *

CANADIAN BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-376, an act to amend the Canadian Bill of Rights (right to housing).

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

* * *

EDUCATION STANDARDS ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-377, an act to establish national standards across Canada for education provided by the provinces.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

CANADIAN BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-378, an act to amend the Canadian Bill of Rights (right to literacy).

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

* * *

OIL AND GAS OMBUDSMAN ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-379, an act to establish the office of Oil and Gas Ombudsman to investigate complaints relating to the business practices of suppliers of oil or gas.

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

* * *

MAXIMUM SPEED CONTROL DEVICE ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-380, an act to provide for the use of a maximum speed control device for use on motor vehicles and to prohibit the manufacture and sale of motor vehicles that are not equipped with a maximum speed control device.

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

* * *

COMPETITION ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-381, an act to amend the Competition Act (vertically integrated gasoline suppliers).

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

* * *

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-382, an act to amend the National Archives of Canada Act and the Statistics Act.

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

* * *

CREDIT INFORMATION ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-383, an act respecting the release of credit information.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-384, an act to amend the Criminal Code.

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

DEFICIT PREVENTION ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-385, an act to prevent deficit budgets.

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

* * *

CHILDREN IN LAW ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-386, an act to amend certain statutes to standardize the definition "child" in conformity with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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

* * *

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY (SOCIAL INSURANCE NUMBERS) ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-387, an act to protect personal privacy by restricting the use of social insurance numbers.

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

* * *

CANADA SEAT BELT ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-388, an act respecting seat belts in federal vehicles and school buses.

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-389, an act to amend the Income Tax Act, the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act, the Public Service Superannuation Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act (dependent beneficiaries).

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

* * *

MEDICAL DEVICES REGISTRY ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-390, an act to establish and maintain a national registry of medical devices.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the bill deals with the fact that across Canada we have thousands of medical devices, some of which are inserted inside the bodies of children or adults.

From time to time the manufacturers of those devices have gone bankrupt or have had some difficulties with those devices. When there are problems with those devices it is imperative that the ministry or the people in charge of a national registry inform those patients of the fact that there are deficiencies in those devices that are inserted in their bodies.

At the same time, if a company no longer exists, there could be some changes in terms of products and those kind of things.

With the technological advancements that exist in our nation and around the world, it is time for us to have a mechanism where at least we would know as a government what is available on the market and what the problems are with those devices.

The purpose of the bill is to establish that national registry.
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

NATIONAL CIVIL DEFENCE FORCE ACT

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-391, an act to establish a National Civil Defence Force.

He said: Mr. Speaker, all we have to do is go back to the ice storm, which hit most of eastern Canada, to realize how important it is for us to establish a national mechanism to deal with crises, whether it be provincial or interprovincial.

The purpose of the bill is to establish a national institution that would coordinate efforts to deal with issues affecting crises from time to time, whether it be a flood, a natural disaster or something else. The organization would be manned and supported by volunteers from across the nation. Those volunteers would be trained and coordinated through some sort of a mechanism.

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

* * *

MARRIAGE (PROHIBITED DEGREES) ACT

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-392, an act to amend the Marriage (Prohibited Degrees) Act and the Modernization of Benefits and Obligations Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of tabling this bill once again in the House, the purpose of which is to modernize the definition of marriage to include same sex spouses, in other words, to allow those gay and lesbian people who choose to marry their partner, to have the option of doing so.

The purpose of the bill is to reflect recent decisions of both the Ontario and Quebec courts that have extended marriage to include same sex couples. They have recognized that, under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, freedom from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation includes the right of gay and lesbian people to marry.

I want to point out very briefly that this will not in any way weaken the institution of marriage, but rather it will strengthen marriage by making it more inclusive and more reflective of the diversity of Canadian families.

Routine Proceedings

I want to thank the member for Vancouver East for seconding this important bill today on the eve of Valentine's Day, a bill which will ensure that all couples, gay, lesbian and straight, have the opportunity to celebrate their committed, loving relationships through marriage.

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

* * *

● (1030)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-393, an act to amend the Criminal Code (breaking and entering).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to introduce the bill. This is the third time I have introduced it.

The purpose of the bill is to provide for the imposition of a minimum mandatory period of imprisonment of two years upon a second and subsequent conviction for the offence of break and enter where the offence was committed in relation to a dwelling house.

A break and enter crime is much more than a property offence. It is a crime against a person. It is a psychologically damaging crime, leaving victims feeling personally violated and traumatized.

Our courts have given judgments and the average judgment has been around six to eight months. Most break and enters are repeat offenders. The minimum two year sentence will ensure that repeat offenders are taken off the streets and given the necessary rehabilitation to break the cycle of crime. That is why it is my pleasure to introduce the bill.

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

* * *

BANK ACT

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-394, an act to amend the Bank Act (bank mergers).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the bill before the House today is to prevent the merger of banks with each other or federally incorporated bodies to create one bank unless the Superintendent of Financial Institutions advises the Minister of Finance that the merger is necessary to prevent an insolvency or informs the minister that none of the applicants wishing to merge are about to be insolvent. In such a case, the merger would have to be approved by a resolution of the Senate and the House of Commons. Today mergers are approved by the Minister of Finance.

This is a bill to democratize the process where if it happens, it happens by a vote of the House of Commons.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

PETITIONS

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, once again, from across my constituency and across the province, and pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to present to Parliament another petition in which the petitioners severely condemn the government's position on pornography.

BILL C-250

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, today I have four separate petitions, all from my riding of Red Deer.

The first two petitions have been signed by 128 people who do not want Bill C-250 to be passed in any form into federal law.

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the third petition has been signed by 27 people who call upon Parliament to focus its legislative support on adult stem cell research to find the cures and therapies necessary to treat suffering Canadians.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the fourth petition has been signed by 209 individuals who pray that Parliament will take all necessary measures to ensure that materials which promote pedophilia involving children are outlawed.

FISHERIES

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to present this morning.

The first petition is directed to the House from shrimp fishermen on the west coast. They are concerned about the government's plan to impose exorbitant management fees directly on active shrimp fishermen. They claim that the fees will essentially put them out of business. It will increase their costs by a factor of four.

I do understand that the minister may be addressing this issue, and appreciate it, but this is certainly encouragement for him to continue his efforts in that direction.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I have concerns child pornography.

The petitioners note that Parliament is not expressing the wishes of people on this matter. They call upon Parliament to protect our children and to put laws in place that will do just that.

COAST GUARD

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the third petition concerns the coast guard.

The petitioners note that the coast guard no longer has sufficient resources to do the job that we expect of it. It is short of hovercraft

on the west coast. Certainly the non-financing of the newly reinstated dive team is a concern as well.

The petitioners call upon the House to direct the minister to put in place more funding for the coast guard.

• (1035)

[Translation]

PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the member for Laval Centre, who is the Bloc Quebecois critic on disability issues, I am pleased to table a petition signed by almost 6,000 people, who ask that Parliament object to any plans to restrict access to the disability tax credit and to ensure that the government hold off on passing any measures in the House without prior discussions and consultations with disability organizations and health care professionals.

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present two petitions on behalf of my constituents, the first one being signed by 66 individuals who are against the slaughter of horses and the sale of horse meat for human consumption.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by several thousand people from my riding who are opposed to child pornography and who would like Parliament to protect our children by taking all necessary steps to ensure that all materials which promote or glorify pedophilia and sado-masochistic activities involving children are outlawed.

CANADA POST

Mr. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I have the honour to present a petition signed by many constituents from the greater Toronto area.

The petitioners are concerned that rural route mail couriers often earn less than minimum wage and have no collective bargaining guides under section 13(5) of the Canada Post Corporation Act. They are calling upon Parliament to repeal this section of the act and ensure that these basic rights are available to all rural route mail couriers.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Larry Spencer (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions this morning to present, one from eastern Canada and one from western Canada. Both are calling upon Parliament to write laws that outlaw all types of child pornography materials.

Supply

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—NATIONAL IDENTITY CARD

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the introduction of a national identity card offends the principle of privacy and other civil rights of Canadians and this House therefore opposes its introduction.

She said: Mr. Speaker, we hope the debate today will be an opportunity for all members of the House to state their opinions, positions and concerns about the proposal for a national identity card.

I would like to begin my remarks by quoting from the federal privacy commissioner George Radwanski. He said:

The right to anonymous is at the very core of human dignity, autonomy and freedom.

He went on to say in a speech that he gave at Carleton University in Ottawa last March, that:

We need to make loss of privacy the exception, not the new way of doing business.

He went further and said that:

The burden of proof must always be on those who say that a new intrusion on privacy is necessary to meet some important social need.

He went on further to articulate and lay out some of the tests that would be involved in whether a need had been established.

I point out, Mr. Speaker, that I am sharing my time with the member for Winnipeg—Transcona.

On that basis, the burden of proof is on the government to show why a national identity card should be introduced.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration came to the standing committee last week. I was there when he spoke. Although he said we needed to have an open debate and he and the government welcomed ideas from the committee and Canadians, I really felt the minister seemed quite intrigued with and sold on the idea that we needed a national identity card. He presented it on the basis that there were issues around national security and that there was a need to have information contained in a card that could be clearly identified, and so on.

However, he also raised another question which I found quite disturbing. At the committee meeting, he said:

—any debate about identity cards should not centre exclusively on issues of national security. Far more important are the issues of citizenship and entitlement to services.

He then went on to say:

—it will be important to acknowledge that we have before us more than an opportunity to debate an identity card. We are also seeking to clarify what it means to be a citizen, a Canadian... Establishing one's identity goes to the very essence of these questions.

This is disturbing because it raises the spectre that somehow the state has the power to not only create a national identity card, maybe for the purposes of some sort of security, but also now because it revolves around the question of establishing what is a Canadian identity, what is one's own self identity. It seems to me that the state has no business in that determination. Who we are as Canadians is something that we individually have the right to determine. That is not a power that can be or should be conferred on the state.

In looking at the question of whether there is a need for a national identity card, already quite a debate has unfolded. Some of the very dangerous situations that could come from a national identity card have already been articulated and it really moves us into a very slippery slope.

There is no question that such a card can be seen as a tremendous invasion of privacy, as set forward by the privacy commissioner. A widely used identity card would in effect allow the state and various enforcement agencies like the police to monitor the movements of citizens.

I am sure the minister will tell us today that the card will only be used for specific purposes, that it will be well guarded and our privacy will be well guarded, but this is the thin edge of the wedge. This is the beginning of a whole new kind of society where personal information about each of us will be encoded on a card, stored somewhere and used in a variety of ways.

● (1040)

That is a fundamental concern based on principle. Beyond that, there are other concerns. One concern is, if the national identity card did exist, it would be opened to abuse. Some say that they have the most honourable of reasons for having the cards, but once the system is in place it is open to abuse by police and various other authorities. Also, it can be used to harass, for example, minority groups by demanding that the identity cards be shown, if they are stopped.

We have other identity cards such as a drivers licence or a passport, and they are used for specific purposes. However to have everything wrapped up in one card and if someone fails to produce that card, it sets the stage for more intrusive searches and for racial profiling, which we have already seen post-September 11.

The New Democratic Party has been very vigilant in calling the government to account for allowing practices of racial profiling to take place at the border, for example. We believe the introduction of a national identity card will take us further into that kind of environment where minorities become subject to harassment and abuse by authorities.

This card will allow for very controlled information. The individual, who is the subject of that card, will have no knowledge as to whom may share that information. I would like to quote from a constitutional lawyer, Mr. Morris Manning, who appeared before the immigration committee on February 10. He said:

Supply

If it goes to the RCMP it will surely go to the FBI. If it goes to the FBI it will surely go to Interpol and if it goes to Interpol it will be disseminated around the world.

He issued that as a warning as to what kind of direction we would be taking as a Canadian society if we embarked on this venture of a national identity card.

We have been told that the United States will become a lot stricter in its rules and requirements for allowing people to cross the border. A national identity card may be one way to respond to this. However it is ironic, while we are considering the use of this card, that within the United States there is no such discussion about a card. We have to wonder who is calling the shots here. Are we as a society willing to give up our privacy? Are we willing to abandon civil rights on the basis that somehow our Canadian passport is not a legitimate document to travel with across the border?

The NDP has very serious concerns about the card. We encourage members of the House to think about where this proposal will take us. We hope that members of the House will look at the substantial reasons around principle and substance that should make us incredibly cautious about moving in this direction. We should send a message to the minister who, according to various news reports, does not necessarily have the support of cabinet. In fact there may be voices on the other side that are very concerned about this.

We hope the debate today will allow an airing of opinions and positions and will send a message to the government that this is not the way that we should go. We should protect the privacy and the rights of Canadians. We should not allow this identity card to become the thin edge of the wedge. We should not go down a slippery slope to a different kind of society I think that none of us want to see in Canada.

• (1045)

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, while I was travelling in Europe recently, I found that a number of countries had these cards and had them for some time. In asking about the card, officials cited many benefits to it. However some officials took the same approach as the member has taken. It appears, however, that this card has become quite a common thing for people to carry, like we carry our drivers licence.

Why do countries in Europe look positively on the identity card, but we hear only negative things about it here?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. There has been some debate already about the benefits. One benefit is that it will help deal with theft. People lose their credit cards and other cards. If there are security measures around this card, it will somehow deal with that.

However the irony is when we place so much information in one card, from the point of view of someone who wants to steal that information, it becomes an even more valuable item to access. Even from a security point of view in terms of theft, which is supposedly one of the benefits, there are some very serious questions.

Just because these cards exist elsewhere should in no way compel us to embark on a similar course of action. We have a tradition in this country of respecting privacy and individual rights. We have documents and cards for individual purposes. I would ask the

question back to the member. What is wrong with that system? Is that not adequate to deal with the purposes of travel, driving or other kinds of identification?

• (1050)

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am 100% opposed to the identification cards that the government wants all Canadians to possess. I refer back to the requirement of the government that all firearms owners to have a card of identification.

The Privacy Commissioner has indicated very clearly that the questions asked on the form to get personal firearm licence cards create a big government databank on individuals which is against the privacy rights of Canadians. That issue has not been fully addressed.

Is that the concern of the member with this motion today, that in fact the privacy and the civil liberties of Canadians are being trampled upon by the Liberal government?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, coming back to the comments of the privacy commissioner, he has said very clearly that the burden of proof has to be on the government or agency which wants to intrude upon privacy. They have to clearly establish that it is for a particular purpose.

The member has raised the gun registry. Whenever a new card or a new system of registration is created, it must always be on the basis of some established need. The onus in terms of public policy is on all of us to demonstrate that exists.

The idea of a national identity card as a super card or a mega-card goes way beyond anything we have ever seen in terms of the need for individual cards or registration. We can argue on the gun registry, but we should be clear that the national identity card will go way beyond that in terms of whatever specific need has been demonstrated.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am also opposed to a national identity card.

Recently, for example, a computer hard drive belonging to an insurance company and credit union in Regina was stolen. The company called its clients to tell them, "check your bank balance, because some money might be missing".

Imagine if people had a card with all their personal information. If they lost their card, what might happen? It might fall into the hand of people who, with today's technology, would be able to decode all the information in the card. This offends the principle of privacy.

What does the member think of this kind of card containing all an individual's, a Canadian's, personal information and the right to privacy in Canada?

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has raised a very good graphic example of what already happens and how we have to be vigilant about the protection of data. That is under an existing situation. We have even had situations in the House where data has been shared between departments. That has been a huge issue at HRDC.

Again it really elevates and raises the concern of what would happen if we had a national card and some sort of centrally controlled databank and how that would impact on the privacy of people.

• (1055)

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the member for Vancouver East has put the argument against a national identity card well and I hope to be able to elaborate a little bit on it, but first I want to reiterate what was said by the member for Vancouver East, that the NDP sees itself today as providing the House with an opportunity to hear people out on this emerging issue. It is an emerging issue in part because the minister has made it one by going around and talking about it in committee and elsewhere. Clearly he would like to hear not just from Canadians but, I presume, from other members of Parliament about this, and that is what this debate is about today.

I think we will find or I hope we will find that this is an issue that does not fall neatly into any sort of right or left categories, that there will be people on all parts of the political spectrum who will have concerns. Obviously as the NDP and as a left wing party we have concerns, but I would imagine that people on the right wing of the political spectrum would also have concerns about this to the extent that this increases the power of the state, et cetera. To the extent that Liberals have any principles at all, perhaps they could draw on whatever principles they have to come up with an analysis, but I am just not sure what those principles are.

I see that the minister is in the House and presumably he is going to respond in the debate. I thank him for his presence here today. I look forward to hearing what he has to say on the matter.

One of the things that disturbs me most about this is that I see a pattern developing here. I was the justice critic during the time of the introduction of the anti-terrorism legislation, Bill C-36. I certainly had the feeling at that time from the then justice minister, now the health minister, when I listened to her in committee, that we were not doing this entirely of our own accord, that we were not doing this entirely for our own reasons.

Many times I would listen to the minister and it would seem to me that what she was saying was code for the fact that “we are doing this”, and in that case they were actually doing something and at this point the minister is only thinking about it, but he is thinking about it, it seems to me, because somebody else wants him to think about it. Here I am thinking of our neighbours to the south.

I know that certain elements of the anti-terrorism legislation were designed in order to please Washington and I wonder whether a similar thing is not happening here. Of course one of the other similarities is that sometimes we actually go further than the Americans themselves would. There were elements of the anti-terrorism legislation, Bill C-36, that went further than the anti-terrorism legislation that we found in the United States.

For instance, I think that the sunset provisions in some of the anti-terrorism legislation in the United States were actually better than the sunset provisions or so-called sunset provisions in Bill C-36. With respect to a national identity card we have a similar thing happening because here we have Canadians considering whether or not to have

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a national identity card, yet the issue is not really an issue at all in the United States.

In fact, I understand that the United States Congress, at least, is so wary of such an idea that it inserted a line in the bill that created the Department of Homeland Security which reads like this: “Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize the development of a national identification system or card”.

If there is any truth to what I am saying the minister will have an opportunity to stand up and deny it, I suppose, although whether that will change my mind or not is another matter. But if there is any truth to what I am saying, that this is somehow in part responding to what the Americans want us to do, that somehow they do not feel a Canadian passport is good enough anymore at the border so they want Canadians to be able produce a national ID card, it is not the first time that we have gone further than the Americans themselves are willing to go when it comes to this whole response to the new environment created by September 11, 2001.

• (1100)

I think the government is once again set on this course. When listening to the minister it seems it is. Even though we are having a discussion and he wants to hear what people have to say, it seems to me that he is pretty intent on this. Once again we are striking the wrong balance between freedom and security and erring, I think, too much on the side of so-called security.

I say so-called security because it seems to me that there is not a whole lot of evidence that a national ID card will make anybody any safer and will prevent terrorism or be the kind of tool that is absolutely necessary for the detection of terrorists or whatever. Terrorists are terrorists and they know how to produce false ID. It will be ordinary Canadians who will have their lives most significantly changed by this if the government goes ahead with it. This is why we are very much against this idea.

We have the privacy commissioner, who is very concerned about this, and I think that if we appoint these people like Mr. Radwanski to be the privacy commissioner and to think deeply about these issues, we should pay attention to what they person has to say about these things. Clearly he is very concerned about the idea of a national ID card.

He is also concerned, and this is another area where the government is not listening to Mr. Radwanski, about the invasion of privacy that the government is contemplating through the legislation which would enable the government to collect data on where Canadians travel on every plane they take and keep that information for up to six years or something like that, I think. At one point, still, but not for very long if the government has its way, one would like to think that one could catch a plane, travel around the country and not have that information going into a data bank somewhere and being analyzed for a variety of purposes, not all of them necessarily for a good purpose. The existence of that kind of data at all, it seems to me, is unwarranted.

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Here we have a pattern emerging, I guess this is what I am trying to say, we have a pattern emerging where, on the basis of what happened on that one day on September 11, 2001, we are transforming our whole way of life. We are transforming our notions of what constitutes appropriate power, power of the state. We are transforming our notions of privacy. We are transforming our notions of freedom. We are transforming our notions of security. I think the government is consistently getting it wrong on this and it is going to get it wrong one more time if it proceeds with the national ID card.

As a final point, one can only imagine how much this will cost. In the short term, if it happens quickly, it will be run by Liberals. When one thinks of what they were able to do in terms of mismanagement when it came to the gun registry, when it comes to this they could bankrupt the country. This could make the gun registry look like a molehill compared to the mountain that the Liberals certainly would be able to create with this. I do not know which company that is a friend of the Liberals this would be contracted out to, but—

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian: That's a bit too low. Come on.

Mr. John Cannis: We didn't think you were a cheap artist.

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Oh, they seem a little sensitive about that, Mr. Speaker. I do not know, maybe it has something to do with recent history.

In any event, one of the things that we all have to be concerned about is not just the principle but also the practicality of it. One can certainly imagine what kind of cost overrun might be involved here. I do not know whether the minister is going to give us an estimate today, but I guess we would have to check the record to see how much we should multiply that estimate by in order to come up with what the real cost will be down the road.

• (1105)

I say this only half in jest because we do know that there was a very, very serious cost overrun when it came to the gun registry. I wanted to put that on the record, but my main point of course is the objection in principle to the idea of a national ID card and to the invasion of privacy that this would represent. It is part of a pattern in which the government has been involved since September 11, 2001. I would ask the minister to consider very seriously not just the arguments that we have made but the arguments that many other people are making about whether or not this is in fact an advisable way to proceed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Lanctôt (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, government representatives are saying that, in seeking to create such a card, they are leading the way.

Are they not leading the way to destroying democracy and freedom, both in Quebec and Canada, in seeking to introduce a card chock full of private information? How can people think they are leading the way if they want to destroy something as fundamental as the right to privacy in a free country such as this? I am sure that members do not want to just hand over their private life to the government on a silver platter. How is that progress?

I would like to know what the hon. member for the New Democratic Party thinks of this.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I share the member's concern that we do not know exactly at this point what all kinds of information would be included on such a card. Maybe we will all have a bar code and that bar code may be related to a database that will tell us all kinds of things about ourselves or tell others all kinds of things about ourselves, but whatever it is, whenever that code is accessed or that card is lost, it means that that much more of our personal information is available in a way that it ought not to be.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Charbonneau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the argument raised by our colleague from the New Democratic Party. He says he is against an identification card, when all we are doing today is debating the issue. He must suspect that the minister is in favour of it, although it is just a suspicion at this point. He says he is against it; he does not know what an ID card would entail, but he is against it.

Is that how he would contribute to the democratic process? Would it not be more reasonable to agree to a debate and, if there are good arguments against this plan, they will come out when the committee considers it and hears from witnesses? We, too, have some concerns. All the parties have questions.

Why would he not agree to a debate? If he is so sure of himself today, why are we not voting on the motion, since we are obviously launching into a debate.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I did say at the beginning that I wanted a debate and that even though I have a position of my own and we have a position as a caucus, we certainly will be listening to what other people have to say. We realize that today is not the last word in this debate, so in keeping with the spirit of the advice offered by the hon. member, we will listen with an open but nevertheless skeptical mind to those who think that this is a good idea.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, interestingly enough, the member from Anjou who just spoke was quoted on this topic when it first came up, saying that he did not think that the government had a stellar track record on this issue, that there are millions of additional social insurance cards in circulation, that passwords have been stolen from Canadian offices abroad, and I think he even asked, "Can you ensure this won't be another bureaucratic nightmare?" In light of what the member has just said, how would my colleague respond to our other colleague?

• (1110)

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I hope the member across the way will have an opportunity to participate in this debate and perhaps express some of the concerns that he has already expressed about this particular idea.

It raises another point. Why not have the government focus its attention on getting those systems which are already in place running properly? Passports, social insurance cards, et cetera, are examples of the kinds of things we worry about. If the national ID card were to be as available as social insurance cards are, then we would have a real problem would we not? It would seem to me that the government should get its act together on these other files before it even considers anything like this.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the New Democratic Party for introducing this motion and for allowing this issue to be debated.

I have a great deal of respect for the member for Winnipeg—Transcona; I would have liked him to keep the debate on a higher plane.

[English]

It is some cheap political point, but that is his problem. He will have to live with it. We all want to keep our credibility. However, I thank him for some of his work.

The time has come to look at ourselves and to talk about fundamental issues to define the Canadian way, to take a stand and to protect our way. Today I am not only a minister, I am a Canadian citizen who fears what is going on in the field internationally and domestically. I believe that the world has changed.

If the debate today were based only on innuendo and fearmongering, the same people in the past probably would have believed that the world was flat. The time has come to really protect our way.

This is not about attacking privacy. It is about protecting it.

[Translation]

Last week, I explained to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration why I believe the issue of a national ID card is worthy of public debate. I told the committee that I am eager to know what Canadians from all fields, experts and non-experts alike, have to say about this concept.

I am happy that the committee thought the issue deserves serious, thoughtful discussion. By seeking out the facts across the country during their current consultations, they will surely help us distinguish reality from myth.

There are some who have publicly railed against a national ID card without having listened to all the arguments. They are closing the door on democracy.

[English]

When I hear the Privacy Commissioner say that he is against debate even before listening to the arguments, what kind of democracy is that? My definition of a democracy is to put everything on the table and have some debate. We are not talking about making a decision today, we are having a debate.

It is not about a card; it is about finally having an identity policy in our country. I hear people talk all the time about big brother and so

Supply

on. They should look at the banks, the social insurance numbers and all the databases that exist. They should look at the insurance companies, the Internet and the computers. We are everywhere. That is why we need to have a real debate among ourselves on how we can protect our identity and our Canadian way.

On the other hand, of course there is an international situation. There is a situation at borders, not only with the Americans, but in Europe too. We have to decide among ourselves what is sufficient to protect our identity, how we can remain ourselves and protect the Canadian way. That is what it is all about.

I thought our country had a Charter of Rights and Freedoms. To talk about a police state is fearmongering. Let us keep our powder dry and decide among ourselves. It is a non-partisan issue. It is not a government issue. It is a Canadian issue. That is why I salute the motion. Everybody will have a say and we will talk about it. Instead of the government coming to the House and saying what we will do, we will decide among ourselves what we think about it and then we will make a decision.

I respect the standing committee. It is so important to respect members of Parliament that I asked the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration to take a look at it. It is a non-partisan issue. There will be many statements from people on the other side who believe it is a good thing. There are some people who have concerns but a lot of people will support it.

We polled 3,000 people. Seventy-six per cent believe that the time has come to protect our identity and our privacy. If it takes a card, and it depends what we want on it and I will talk about that, then so be it. We will decide among ourselves.

What is important is that we have a national debate on a national identity card. A lot of questions remain unanswered. That is why all of us together need to decide what we want to do. The world has changed, as I have said.

•(1115)

[Translation]

There is no doubt that the terrorist attack on the United States, on September 11, 2001, changed the world. The countries of Europe closed rank. The Europe of 15 just keeps growing. Since the Schengen accords, there has been a protection movement among European countries. They are protective of one another. They have agreed among themselves on some commonality in terms of identity.

Identity cards exist in 100 countries around the world. It is not a matter of reacting to the U.S., but rather of saying that if everyone is asking for this, is there a way to ensure that we can remain what we are?

Much is positive about identity. There is the whole issue of international security. Yes, it will prevent terrorism. It may be possible to put the technology to friendly use, with biometrics for instance, so that we can be sure that the person in front of us is really who that person claims to be.

Supply

[*English*]

Biometrics belong to us. I do not know if Steven Spielberg has made a sequel to *Minority Report* or if there will be another James Bond movie on that subject, but what I know from the experts is that my thumbprint and my iris belong only to me. Is there a way to use biometrics in a friendly manner to protect ourselves?

Our colleagues travel all over the world. At the Amsterdam airport there is a special program called Privium which is an iris scan. Those who use it for efficiency purposes have a card which they put in the scan and they look at the scanner and there is a red light or a green light. That is what it is all about.

An issue which is very important to me is that of identity theft. Since 2001 almost 12,000 people in Canada have been victims of identity fraud. According to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, identity fraud is the fastest growing fraud in North America. We talk about money. How much is it worth? The Canadian Council of Better Business Bureaus estimates that identity theft costs \$2.5 billion a year to consumers, banks, credit card firms, stores and other businesses. These are staggering numbers and they are expected to grow. That is \$2.5 billion a year and it is not even sanctioned by the Criminal Code. We have to take a look at that.

The issue is not just about whether or not we need an ID card. With all the databases that exist in our country and with all the problems we are facing in the domestic field, we need to stop burying our heads in the sand and have a debate on identity policy.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

The biggest threat to individual privacy is to have one's identity stolen and used by someone else.

Our fellow citizens have every reason to demand tools to protect what is uniquely theirs: their identity. Is there a way to protect our seniors? Is there a way to protect our youth? Is there a way to develop prevention tools to protect once and for all our most precious possession, our identity?

[*English*]

There is an implicit, if not explicit, expectation that governments need to look at current practices and systems of establishing an identity and evaluate their effectiveness. This is where the need for a public debate on a national ID card fits.

I have proposed that we examine the pros and cons of a national ID card. Do we need to examine whether any such card should be voluntary or mandatory? What technologies, if any, can help to secure identity? Do these technologies present unmanageable threats to privacy or can the technologies be used to enhance privacy? How should biometric identifiers be stored?

What have we recently learned? Recent developments suggest the time is right for a debate.

Within a few years, maybe much sooner, the ability of Canadian citizens and permanent residents to cross international borders will depend more and more on the integrity of their documents.

We live in a changing world. Of course in the United States there will be an entry and exit program. My friend, my parliamentary secretary, himself witnessed this and said he felt ashamed because he was asked for his fingerprints when he went to the United States. Is there a way to prevent racial profiling? Is there a way to protect Canadian citizens? Is there a way to protect our permanent residents, 80% of whom will become future Canadian citizens? This is what I am interested in.

We are not living in our own little bubble here. When people go to the United States and are fingerprinted, do we not think it is important to have that kind of debate beforehand among ourselves and decide if there is a way to prevent racial profiling? A thumbprint or an iris does not have a race or a religion. Is there a way to make sure when those people are going to the United States they will not be asked where they are from and told, "Oh, you were born in Syria? You're on the bad list. Please step aside"? This is what it is all about: to protect the Canadian way, to protect the fact that we are different, that we celebrate that difference and that we want to be what we want to be. We want to remain Canadian, to be proud of it and to make sure that nobody will touch that, ever.

We can forget about going through with a driver's licence and saying "this is me". Okay, let us say it is a picture of you, but is it really you? That is why we need to use biometrics. There are many ways to use biometrics in a friendly manner. If we have a card, it is up to us to decide what we will put on it. We spoke about a bar code. I agree with that. That might be a good way.

We have what we call off line and on line. Off line means all we need to do is to reproduce an iris or a fingerprint on a bar code. When the person is scanned it is not for accessing a database. It is just that it confirms that the cardholder and what is on the card are the same. The person puts their finger on the scan, red light, green light, and go for it. If there is a green light, that is all right. It can take something like 15 seconds per person to go through. Imagine what we can do. In the past some people felt that computers were bad for us, that technology was bad. These are the same kind of people who felt that Galileo was wrong, and that is their problem.

During the course of the debate on a national ID card, the protection of privacy should be and must be a paramount consideration. We must also guard against rushing to judgment. We have already seen that there are strong opinions on both sides of the debate. Some people say to go for it, that yes, it is important. I know that at least 70% of the Canadian people feel that this is a good idea, but they want to make sure that it is risk free. How can we manage that? What we require is objectivity, an open debate based on facts and reason, not innuendo and myth.

In fact, as we look outside Canada there are some countries that are carefully considering this issue. In Europe every country has an ID card except Ireland and the U.K. Last July the United Kingdom launched a public consultation on the introduction of an ID card. In releasing the discussion paper, Home Secretary David Blunkett established a very significant point:

...any debate about ID cards should not centre exclusively on issues of national security. Far more important are the issues of citizenship and entitlement to services—

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Belgium recently announced it will include smart card technology on its national identity card to protect the integrity of this document and better protect personal information.

[*English*]

What we can learn from countries such as Belgium is that these advanced technologies have the capability to increase privacy and protection.

The lesson has been registered by some. Australia has a privacy commissioner, too, Mr. Malcolm Crompton, who has stated:

...biometrics have the potential to benefit individuals and society and indeed could have privacy enhancing capabilities.

Do members want some quotes from civil rights activists? Alan M. Dershowitz, the famous law professor from Harvard, said:

...I support a national identity card with a chip that can match the holder's fingerprint. It could be an effective tool for preventing terrorism, reducing the need for other law-enforcement mechanisms—

Hey, not bad.

—especially racial and ethnic profiling—that pose even greater dangers to civil liberties.

He also said that we should not mix “privacy and anonymity”. People are talking about the right to be anonymous and I do not know if they have filed their income taxes lately, but in this world I think that everybody knows who everybody is. The time has come to take a stand.

I want to hear from everyone before any decisions are made. My driving motivation is to serve the legitimate interests of Canadians. No, I have not taken a decision. What I would like to have is a clear, fair and objective debate. I think that it touches everyone, that it is everyone's business. Instead of reacting to a situation, I think that prevention is the essence. Together we should decide among ourselves what is good for Canada. It is a non-partisan issue.

I believe that it is in the interests of all Canadians that we do not jump to conclusions on this issue before the facts are out. There are important questions involved. Some of those questions do not have simple, ready made answers. The motion we are discussing today takes issue with the idea of a national ID card. The motion implies that the card would be incompatible with our civil rights. I hope that I have showed the opposite today. I do not believe this is true, but that is precisely what I am asking for, an open and informed debate.

Before drawing any conclusions, I would rather let Canadians hear the facts and better understand the issue. We do, after all, live in an information society, and this debate is about democracy.

Supply

[*Translation*]

This is a debate that will define us as Canadians and also define us as Quebeckers. It is a matter of looking at what is going on in the world. We must stop being hypocrites and saying, “I can see nothing, therefore nothing is going on”. Together, let us make a decision and ensure that this country is indeed the best in the world and remains so.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for coming to the House and laying out his plan for a national identity card, or at least for consultations with Canadians as he considers the pros and cons of such a card.

In the annual report given by the privacy commissioner, he brought out some huge concerns that he has with regard to privacy issues that would stem from having a national identity card with a fingerprint or retina or whatever else for identification. It has been said that social insurance numbers could become the basis for such cards. As we know, over the past little while there have been problems with the social insurance numbers. There have been more issued than there are people to receive them. Many people have more than one card.

Is this foolproof? How are we going to enforce such a card with the amount of importance that would be placed on that one card? How are we going to address privacy concerns, theft, the fraudulent use of a card, counterfeiting and biometrics?

Some people are very concerned and I know the minister understands this. Some are very concerned about the big brother approach that this may bring. Some have said that even without a card we have the ability to affix a little chip on our hand or under our skin that would never be lost or stolen. Certainly that is feared by most Canadians. Could the minister give us some wisdom?

• (1130)

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I hope I will not have to put a chip in my hand or something like that.

I believe that the social insurance number is not an ID. It is not an identity issue. It is a number. There are several kinds of databases, not just in the government. When we go for a medical, when we buy insurance, when we buy a car, when we go into a bank, there are databases everywhere.

When we are talking about identity we are talking about authenticity. It is an authentication process. We want to know who a person in front of us is without asking a lot of different questions, and that is the bottom line. That is why we need these kinds of ID cards.

Supply

Do we need that? Are we ready for it? It is up to us. I am open for it, but when I look at identity theft, and experts can tell the House better than I, I see that cards can be counterfeited unless someone is Q, from James Bond. We cannot counterfeit our own fingerprints because it requires a mathematical calculation, not just a reproduction. There is some science attached to it. It is also the same with the iris of the eye. So unless I cut off your finger and use it, and I do not know how long I could use it, basically I believe that biometrics can be used in a friendly manner. That is why we need a debate. We need to have all those people who secure us tell us if this is the best way to work.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have not heard the minister talk about this. In the European situation where they have that card, it has medical information on it. I was in Switzerland and actually saw it being used when an individual arrived at the hospital with chest pains. His card was put through and within six minutes that person was checked into the ward and a heart surgeon was there. It was a matter of health and safety. I wonder if the minister is thinking about that, because that is certainly the positive side of this. That person's life was saved because all of his medications, his x-rays, everything, were shown on that card.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question, and that is why we need the debate. I agree with my colleague from Winnipeg—Transcona: This is a cultural issue and this is a matter of whether we are ready for it.

[*Translation*]

This kind of debate is no place for baffle-gab, demagoguery and ready-made designs.

[*English*]

It is important to have this kind of debate, with the pros and the cons, and look at the positive approach to an identity policy. First we have to decide among ourselves if we are ready to have an ID card and, second, we have to decide what we want in it. I am very jealous of my privacy. I believe that it is up to us to decide what we want to do with the card. I believe there are a lot of people like the one the member just mentioned for whom, for medical reasons, a smart card would be a good thing.

In my own Province of Quebec I remember that we had a major issue with regard to the health card with a chip in it. There were a lot of pros and cons. But I believe that the world has changed and this is the right opportunity for us to discuss among ourselves what we want to have in the way of an identity policy. When we are ready to make a decision, and if we believe we should go further, I think that because we have great examples in Europe and other countries, maybe that is a good way concretely to apply it.

I do not have any preconceived ideas. I am not here to tell members whether or not we should have a card and what will be on that card. I am asking if we believe that we need it.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Lanctôt (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me today to comment on the speech made by the former Secretary of State for Amateur Sport, who is now the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

The minister told us that we were here to have a debate. However, we heard comments in the House such as “Yes, but you have to do your homework”. We did hear such reactions. I am quite prepared to have a debate, but I hope the minister has not already made up his mind.

I find it dangerous to include such information on the national identity card. Will the card be compulsory or optional? It is very important to know that as well.

For what reasons do we still not have an identity card in Canada and in Quebec? This is 2003 and we have never needed an identity card because our identity, whether we are Canadians or Quebecers, is ours alone. We are entitled to our privacy and to be who we are.

The government is trying to put on a card information that has no business being there, such as medical information, or other information on a person. We are not just talking about the person's name and address. We are talking about biometry, and we are even told that the card will protect us from the theft of various other cards. We are told that it will make things safer.

However, if a person's fingerprints already appear on a card, it is not just to protect his identity, but also to provide information, whether to the police or CSIS. My identity is my very own. It is mine and it is free. My fingerprints belong to me. But now I will have to put them in the hands of the state and several others who will be able to get information on a card.

I think that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Châteauguay knows very well that I never said we would have a card with medical information on it.

I said we should have a debate to see if we are ready to have an ID card. I explained at length that biometrics cannot be considered only for online access but also offline. It would basically be an authentication process.

The member for Laval Centre described an unfortunate experience where someone had used her credit card. She always buys her gas at the same location. Her credit card number was taken. Someone copied it and maxed her card. Speaking personally and not on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, she said “This does not bother me and I do not lose sleep over it”.

How many average citizens have experienced this type of problem? How many people have their identity stolen at ATMs? How many people have their identity stolen when they go to the post office? More than 12,000 people, to the tune of \$2.5 billion. It is not just the government. Imagine all the problems this can cause.

I say that for an authentication process, we have to have a debate and decide what we want out of an ID card. I agree with the member for Châteauguay that we must protect our identity.

I think the time has come to have this type of debate because the world is changing. We have to take our heads out of the sand, because this a problem that we have to address once and for all.

[English]

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to enter into the debate today. I want to thank the minister for speaking to this topic and laying out his thoughts. He raised a number of questions during his debate, which I believe he should have answered. It has really left us wondering more about the topic rather than quenching our thirst for answers within this whole notion of a national identity card.

I also thank my colleagues from the NDP for bringing the motion forward. I thought they may have chosen their opposition day today to talk about the conflict in Iraq, but they have chosen this topic and we will certainly entertain debate on the topic.

The Canadian Alliance is supportive of the NDP motion. We have some serious concerns about the national identity card.

I will begin by first examining the minister's reasons for bringing the initiative forward. He says that we need positive proof identity that offers personal and collective security in light of the events surrounding September 11. People may agree or disagree with that but the debate is about whether this national identity card solves that particular question.

Second, the minister said that global travel would increasingly depend upon the integrity of travel documents, that the United States was considering this and that Canadians may no longer be able to use their drivers licence to cross the border. That is possible and we do need to be concerned about that, but again, is a national identity card the way to solve that particular issue?

The third reason the minister gave for entertaining the notion of a national identity card was that the federal department was responsible for issuing immigration and citizenship documents. He said that because the provinces issue birth certificates which are the basis for passports for travel, drivers licences and health insurance cards, and that these documents were not security proof, we needed one universal card with biometrics. We heard him making that argument in the House again today.

I ask, in rebuttal to that claim, is this the way to go? Is this the card that will solve that particular question?

The minister also said that Canadian companies were at the forefront of these technologies. When my NDP colleague from Winnipeg Transcona asked the minister which possible contributors to the Liberal Party may be involved in producing these cards, he received a wrath of scorn from the minister and Liberal colleagues. However I believe that is a valid question. The minister referred to

Supply

that as a cheap political point. I would suggest to the minister and to the government that when there have been so many concerns about friends of the government benefiting from government programs or the contracts that go along with any development of any program, that is a valid question.

I also found it disappointing that the minister, while deploring that comment from our colleague from the NDP, then engaged in the same kind of activity by referring to members of the Alliance.

The minister also said that the new permanent resident card would be state of the art, that we needed to keep an open mind and that we should not rush to judgment. He said that we required objectivity and that we needed to consider other countries and what they were doing. The minister is putting a lot of faith in biometrics and he is asking Canadians to take a giant leap of faith, not only in his idea but in his government, with the notion of biometrics.

I was going to include a quote but I will skip that and basically summarize what we heard from the minister this morning. He claimed that putting biometrics in an imbedded chip or in a card would be a fail safe way of protecting Canadians' identities. That is a claim that is not provable at this point because the technologies are not at the point where that can be verified.

• (1140)

In making that claim and in placing so much importance on the issue of biometrics being the way to protect our identities as Canadians, the minister has missed a key point in the argument, that being, to believe this point is to put faith in something that is not yet there in the way of technology.

Given the track record of the government and what we have seen in the past with other programs, as my colleagues alluded to this morning, we have some serious concerns. We do not need to look back too far to see where there were some serious concerns about the administration of government programs by the current government. Now the minister is asking us to put our faith in him and his government to put together a national identity program that will actually protect the identity of Canadians. I would simply say that we are not ready to do that.

A number of concerns have been raised, not only today but in the past. One of the major concerns was brought forward by the former minister of immigration and the current Minister of National Revenue. When this idea of a national identify card was brought forward she said:

It makes me nervous. I don't think we need it. That's what I would worry about—police—somebody coming up asking for your ID card. If you're walking down the street minding your own business, nobody would expect in a free and democratic society to be stopped and asked for ID papers

That was said by the former minister of immigration, the current Minister of National Revenue, on the topic. She went on to say:

It's premature to suggest that this would be acceptable to this Cabinet. We haven't had a discussion about it. It's not on the table

Supply

Given what has been going on in cabinet lately, we are all very well aware of what is going on in terms of the Prime Minister who is on the way out and a prime minister who is on the way in, the debates that go on in caucus and the turmoil that has been there. It is no wonder that this has not received approval of the cabinet yet.

I would be interested to know whether or not it has been on the table at cabinet yet and whether there is even agreement among ministers. I do believe that if our NDP colleagues had a votable motion today it would be a very interesting to see exactly where members would stand, in fact, where members of the cabinet would stand on this issue because there certainly does not seem to be agreement even within cabinet on this topic.

What the minister said in the House this morning, just minutes ago, raises all kinds of questions that should have been answered by him but were not. I will dig a little deeper into that in a few minutes.

I want to focus on what some of the other government members have said in terms of the national identity card idea. The member for Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies said that the federal government did not have a stellar track record. I referred to that earlier in the House. He said that millions of additional social insurance cards were in circulation, that passports had been stolen from Canadian offices abroad and that the firearms registry had experienced cost overruns. He then asked the minister if he could ensure that this would not be another bureaucratic nightmare. That was a member of the government asking that. It is no wonder that he had those concerns.

I was surprised a few minutes ago when the minister of immigration told us in the House and told all Canadians that he did not believe the social insurance card was an identity document. What a surprising revelation in the House today. My goodness, a social insurance card is an important document. We know that not too long ago all kinds of databases were being gathered around Canadian social insurance cards and social insurance numbers. All kinds of information was being databased and collected without anybody knowing exactly what was going on. When it came to the light of day that this was going on, the government had to backpedal and try to find some explanation for gathering information around our social insurance numbers. That was an interesting comment that the minister made.

However I am straying from my comments and I will get back to the very important comments that have been made by Liberal colleagues on the topic.

• (1145)

The member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel said that he had difficulties with both the privacy and moral aspects of identity cards. The member for Haliburton—Victoria—Brock said, “I have this big brother problem”. He noted that the federal privacy and information commissioners both expressed deep concerns about ID cards. The member for London North Centre is the chair of the immigration committee. Many of our colleagues are travelling with the immigration committee, and they will not be able to participate in today's debate, which is unfortunate. He said that he had honest scepticism about this whole issue.

Certainly this whole big brother concern, this privacy issue concern, is one that has been raised by others in this place, and

which I and my Alliance colleagues raise as well. Placed in the context of the track record of this government in handling other sensitive information about Canadians, the government is asking us to trust it. It has given us more than ample reason in the past not to. The government's track record is really one of utter incompetence when it comes to the administration of important programs.

There was an important witness at committee, Mr. Morris Manning, who is one of Canada's leading constitutional lawyers. He warned the committee that the ID cards would increase racial profiling, do little to combat terrorism or identity fraud and invade people's privacy by creating a huge database of information.

That claim goes directly against what the minister said earlier in the House today. He told us that these national identity cards would protect our identities and decrease racial profiling. There are arguments on the other side of that issue, so really there is no conclusion. The minister is making assertions without proof that his assertions are in fact true.

There are all kinds of things I could get into but I want to focus on rebutting some of the comments that the minister made this morning in the House.

He said that the topic of a national identity card is not about a card, it is about an identity policy in our country. He asked us to look at the information that banks gather about us, our social insurance numbers, which again he referred to as not an identity document, and to look at the computer, the Internet and all the information out there.

It is because of those kinds of technologies and that information that is out there that Canadians have concerns about the privacy of their own information. We have seen identity fraud. The minister referred to it. Those kinds of concerns are not alleviated by the idea of bringing in a national identity card. In fact they are likely magnified because we have seen many examples of Canadians' information being used in ways that have come back to cause them great concern and great damage.

The minister referred to 12,000 people who have had their identities stolen. I believe that is what he said. It does not take much for us to look at that as a serious concern and something that we do not want to have happen to ourselves.

The minister said that creating this card is all about how we can remain ourselves and protect the Canadian way. I would argue, how can Canadians remain themselves if their identity is not securely protected?

If we do put our faith in this system and the system fails us, what have we gained? Nothing. What have we lost? Quite a bit.

The minister referred to a survey in which 76% of Canadians said that they want to see the protection of their identity. That is a large number of people. That survey he referred to was of about 3,000 people. The minister then took a giant leap and said that these same people agree that his notion of a national identity card is the best way to protect their identity. That is illogical. The minister is getting a conclusion from a piece of information taken for another reason.

Supply

• (1150)

Yes, 76% of people want their identities protected, but does that mean they agree that the national identity card is the way to protect their identity? No, absolutely not. For the minister to make that conclusion I believe is illogical and one that we should take into consideration when examining this idea of a national identity card.

The minister has a lot of other priorities he could focus on and we are wondering why he is proceeding with the national identity card. My colleague from Winnipeg—Transcona mentioned that earlier. Let us fix the systems that are in place now before we embark on a new one.

I could go on for an hour about the refugee determination system. I am sure members would love to hear me go on for an hour on that topic. It is one that I have studied over the years as a member of Parliament. There are all kinds of problems within that system. There are problems with the IMM 1000 document, with our passports and the security of very important identity documents. Those things have not been cleaned up. Why now embark on a new program that has so many questions left unanswered for us?

The minister also raised all kinds of questions. Can this technology help? How will the biometric information be stored? What about the cost? What about the management of this information? These are all valid questions that we have for the minister. We had hoped he would answer those kinds of questions rather than pose them.

If he is at the point of bringing this idea forward, we hoped he would have some kind of cost estimate as to how much this program would cost, given the debacle with the gun registry, another one of the government's billion dollar boondoggles, given what has happened with the HRDC information surrounding our social insurance numbers which I referred to earlier and given any number of mismanaged files on the government's part.

We even had the amazing event not long ago in the House where government members would not approve the estimates for the gun registry. That came to light again in the House yesterday when it was raised that money is still being spent on the gun registry. Where is that money coming from for the Minister of Justice when it was turned down by members of the House, including government members?

I had hoped the minister would bring forward in his debate today the idea of at least a trial project on a national identity card, of running some kind of small scale voluntary program where individuals could test the model before launching into a full scale initiative. It certainly would have been prudent. I think it would have helped his case had he done something like that ahead of time. He could have come to the House with accurate cost projections and information about how a trial project would have worked in terms of the biometrics that he talked about, rather than asking us to take a giant leap of faith in the whole area of this card being the protector of our national identity when the indication is quite clear from many individuals that these concerns have not been addressed.

The minister said he was glad we had this opportunity for debate today. However, if this idea has come this far down the pipeline without having had a full debate at cabinet and without having had

these kinds of questions answered, I wonder if it is not just a way for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to trumpet something that likely will not see the light of day.

I thank my NDP colleagues for bringing forward this motion today. I look forward to what other members have to say on the topic. Certainly I would have hoped to have had a vote on this topic to see where members stood on the issue because I do not think there is a consensus. I hope the minister takes from this debate that there are serious concerns about the idea of a national identity card because it has not been clearly thought out by the government and given its track record, we cannot put our faith in it to administer such a program.

• (1155)

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week when the minister spoke about this issue in the citizenship and immigration committee, he used the phrase that it was for discussion purposes only, that there was no commitment. I commended the minister then and I commend the minister now. Backbenchers often complain that everything is done from the top down. This time the minister has gone from the bottom to the top in asking us to have a discussion on this issue and again the minister is being blamed.

Would the member comment on the motion itself? I know that the motion was introduced by the NDP member for Vancouver East, but I think there is misrepresentation here somehow. The motion mentions "the introduction of a national identity card". There is no introduction of a national identity card, there is a discussion only. Perhaps the member could comment on the motion.

The hon. member also spoke about the meeting we had with the minister last week and the minister's discussion today here in the House. The minister has not made up his mind. He is just asking us for consultation. As a matter of fact the minister will be travelling across the country to get points of view from Canadians. I would like the hon. member to comment on this point too.

• (1200)

Mr. Grant McNally: Mr. Speaker, in regard to the technicality of the motion itself, I believe the intent of the motion is to enter into a debate. Our colleagues from the NDP are saying that they are not in favour of a national identity card program whether or not it is just at the debate stage. I would say the Alliance agrees with that. I cannot speak for my colleagues from other parties, but certainly the questions I raised today go a long way in sending a message to the minister as to where he needs to go with this idea.

I am glad the minister has not made a decision. That is good. I am surprised the debate has gotten this far down the road without the kinds of questions I asked earlier being addressed. As a minister of the crown, I would have hoped he would have had some cost analysis for us on what it will cost. I would have hoped he would have set down some ideas for doing some test trials on a voluntary basis on this program. I would have hoped he would have had some very specific outlines for us before bringing it forward as an idea and saying, "Hey, what do you think about this?" A time and a place for that is fine.

Supply

The fact that the minister is putting so much of his time and energy into this idea signals to us that it is more than just an idea. It is something into which he is putting his time and effort. He just said he wants to show leadership on this issue, so I would argue that it is more than just a point of debate; it is something that he wants to see happen. He is now expending his energy to try to solicit support for this idea. He has said that if it becomes clear that there is not support for the idea, he will not move forward with it.

I am simply saying that there are a lot of questions to be answered about this program before we can proceed with it. If the minister wants our input, he will get it. He is getting it today. He has had it in committee. He will have it when he travels to other areas of the country.

I repeat that what the minister should be doing is focusing on the programs that are not working very well right now in terms of our identity documents. He could work with his colleague from foreign affairs on the whole issue of passports. I know he wanted to move on the maple leaf card which a previous minister introduced to try to solve the problem around the IMM 1000 documents. However, the whole issue of the security of our documents has not been addressed.

Whether it is a national identity card, a biometric card or a combination of both, there is no way we can say that fraud will never happen again if individuals can have access at the ground level to those documents and fill in false information from the very beginning.

I would say let us look very carefully at what the minister is saying, because there are some very big holes in the claims he has made here in the House and across the country. This is a good place to bring those questions forward.

I thank my colleague for the question because it gave me a chance to expound a little bit more on the details of my arguments.

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his comments on this important topic and say that I agree with him. The NDP is also concerned about the concerns of Canadians regarding the loss of identity and protection of identity. When we find out that in a poll of 3,000 people 75% are concerned about that loss of identity, we take that seriously.

The fact that there is a leak requires us to protect that identity by going the route of a national identify card. It does not however address the issues that people are concerned about.

Recently, thousands of Canadians received letters from their insurance company saying that there was a theft, in Regina, of a hard drive and there may have been a lot of important information that was stolen, and that they should keep an eye out at their banks and at various places where they do business to see whether any material had been accessed.

It is disturbing for Canadians to suddenly realize that their information is being moved around and that it can be stolen. As it turns out, it looks like this hard drive may have been stolen for reasons other than for information theft.

I would like to ask the member, how is it that a national identity card would allay the fears of those thousands of people who have had the experience of identity theft in that respect?

•(1205)

Mr. Grant McNally: Mr. Speaker, I would say that there is no way that having a national identity card would alleviate those fears of identity fraud. There was a day when none of us really thought about that whole notion, maybe even five years ago.

However, I even find myself wondering, when I am on the Internet, if somebody is now scanning my computer as I am on it, do I have the proper firewall and do I have the proper protection against identity theft.

Certainly, this card would not ensure that there would be no identity fraud any more. I think it is false faith. The minister is asking us to put our faith in a system, in a technology, that has not even been developed yet and is saying that this is the answer, this will end identity fraud, when in fact he cannot verify that.

He is asking Canadians to take a giant leap of faith. I would say, wait a minute, let us stop and take a very close look at this first. Let us solve the problems with the systems we have now before creating another one which could then suffer from the same kinds of problems.

Mr. Reg Alcock (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will have an opportunity to address this subject more fulsomely when I speak, but I was intrigued by the member's reference to the example used by the former minister of immigration who made some comments, if I understood correctly, that the possession of this card would somehow enable the police to stop someone on the street to demand identification.

Could the member explain that to me? Is there something that prevents the police from stopping people on the street and asking for their driver's licence today or asking people to identify themselves? How would the possession of another piece of identification change the powers of the police?

Mr. Grant McNally: Mr. Speaker, I certainly raised that point. In fact, I gave a direct quote from the former minister of immigration just to highlight that there are concerns among government members about the whole notion. The member would have to take that up with the minister to find out exactly what she was thinking when she said that. I cannot answer for her.

A more salient point that was made by the former minister of immigration, the current Minister of National Revenue, is:

It's premature to suggest that this would be acceptable to this Cabinet. We haven't had a discussion about it. It's not on the table.

That is the whole issue of the national identity card itself.

In terms of whether having another card would stop the police from being able to ask for it, no, I guess it would not. However, I do not know exactly what the minister was driving at with that particular point. I only know that when a former minister of immigration raises concerns about a program being introduced by a cabinet colleague it should raise a red flag for all of us that there is not a unanimous moving forward from the cabinet even on this idea and that there are a lot of questions to be answered. And when cabinet colleagues have questions, we should have them too.

Supply

•(1210)

Mr. Bob Mills: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wish to ask for the unanimous consent of the House regarding a motion concerning private members' business. I wish to move that notwithstanding Standing Order 87(2), the draw for private members' business which is scheduled to be held today at 1:15 p.m. be postponed until Thursday, February 27, 2003, at 1:15 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise today to speak on this motion moved by the New Democratic Party. This is not a votable motion because it was presented on an opposition day, and some motions are votable and others are not. The motion reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the introduction of a national identity card offends the principle of privacy and other civil rights of Canadians and this House therefore opposes this motion.

First, I would like to inform the Chair that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Mercier.

This motion is being moved today because, last November when the federal government and Manitoba were signing a bilateral agreement, the minister publicly mentioned this idea. Since the media more or less ignored it, he brought it up again during an interview. Last week, he mentioned it again, but this time before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The committee wanted its members—currently travelling across Canada regarding a bill under consideration—to consult with Canadians. I have absolutely nothing against the government conducting consultations. Consultations are good, in my opinion; this is a democracy.

However, many years ago, before becoming a member, I studied consulting and communications. Being somewhat of an expert in this field, I would say that, normally, hypotheses and proposals are submitted. Alternatives are sometimes proposed during certain consultations.

In Quebec, for example, I remember having worked with the Minister of Agriculture on estates general on the economy. The minister or the government would mandate public servants to study the issue. If the public servants did not have the expertise needed to examine certain issues, then the government would usually consult experts.

Why am I talking about experts? Because, at first glance, a national identity card—several already exist—seems like a harmless idea. But, in this case, the minister is talking about a smart card, a card with a silicon chip able to store personal information. The minister is not setting guidelines or limitations. He is submitting the entire thing to consultations, in an ad hoc sort of way, which is unusual, at least when it comes to something so serious.

The principle of an identity card is a subject for debate on its own, but what about the personal information they want included on such a card?

If its creation is in reaction to the events of September 11, one may assume that its purpose is to be forewarned of terrorists. But does anyone really believe that a terrorist's card would bear the identification "I am a terrorist"? We are talking of biometric data, and I know that the eyes are the mirror of the soul, but can being a terrorist show up in a person's eyes? That is impossible.

There are other aspects as well. One could raise the question of DNA. Do they want to go that far? The minister does not say. I do not want to get carried away and end up putting words in his mouth. Then there are fingerprints, but the minister does not talk about what the cost of this will be.

•(1215)

We know what is happening with gun control. The Bloc Québécois agreed with the principle of registering firearms, but the problem lies with administering this. They were after information, asking for instance "Do you have a gun, and if so what type?" But we see now that it is costing way more than expected, \$1 billion even, when the initial figure was \$2 million.

People say we ought not to always mistrust government, but we will recall that the Auditor General, in 1998 I think it was, reported that there were 3.8 million more SIN numbers than people in Canada. I am not talking hundreds of thousands, but 3.8 million. That is one example.

Two years ago, the Minister of Finance of the day wanted to give Canadians a gift to offset the increase in heating costs. He sent cheques to dead people. One is therefore justified in questioning the administrative aspect.

I am sure that if the member for Mercier has time, she will broach the subject of Bill C-54 and the fight she led at that time. Like her, I was a member of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. We wondered who would manage this type of personal information and how it would be linked. We know that today, with computers, with data being linked with other data, there are few things that people can keep private. Will this go so far as to include medical data?

What I condemn is the fact that the minister appears open to holding consultations, but everything is so broad that much of the detail gets lost. In my riding, people have asked me why this is being done now.

The minister seems to be making it up as he goes along, which gives us the impression that he is a bit of a puppet. With the pressure since September 11, we know what the government has done in terms of public security. Public security measures have been strengthened. We have seen a shift take place. People have serious questions. They want to know how far the government plans on taking this. We may also wonder just how far the American government will ask us to take it and what changes it will ask us to make in order to meet its requirements.

Supply

I remember a time when you did not even need a passport to enter the United States. All you had to do was say you were a Canadian citizen and you could get through the border without any problem. I understand that there needs to be more control, but should this extend to an identity card for citizens? You have to wonder. The need should be demonstrated, and that has not been done yet.

The government has given people too many reasons to be wary of any attempt to collect personal information. We do not know a whole lot on how and where this information will be used. Unlike the minister, we are not sure that it will protect our identity.

As Réal Caouette said, "The government has your good at heart, and it will manage to get its hands on your goods as well".

• (1220)

[*English*]

Mr. Reg Alcock (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was quite interested in the remarks of the member. I have served with him on other committees and know that he takes these issues very seriously.

Has he had an opportunity to examine the Quebec government's privacy statements and privacy law? I have had an opportunity to meet with some of the public servants in Quebec who work on these issues of government information and how efficiencies are brought about. Quebec has quite a strong privacy policy but it also has a system that reconciles its protection of individual privacy with the use of tools, like unique identifiers and such, to deliver better services to citizens.

That is the nature of this debate from my perspective. There is always a problem moving in a new direction, particularly a direction that reformulates how governments do business. On the one hand, one response to that is to not do it, to run away and be afraid. Some of the things the member has said about fear of government and government processes are very high on that list. I will speak about this when I speak in more detail on this.

However I note that there has been some interesting and creative work done by the government in Quebec. Has the member had a chance to meet with the officials there to get a sense of how they reconcile both the need to access better health information to do better planning and provide better social policy and at the same time provide a guarantee of the right of personal privacy or the right to private life? It is a very difficult problem for legislators.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Antoine Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to reply that there are surely public servants and people within the government who are thinking about this issue. I must be brief, but I will say that the minister responsible for services to citizens, Rémy Trudel, opposed the idea of a compulsory identity card, for a number of reasons after consulting his public officials.

I should also add that, in Quebec, debates have taken place regarding this issue. Of course, there are a number of cards in use, including the health insurance card. I remember that when a chip card was being considered, many people were strongly opposed to the idea.

When people know more about the issue and realize that there is not just an identity card, but also a smart card, there is a lot of opposition, as we will see during the consultation process.

Of course, at this point, the whole issue of costs has yet to be raised. This will require an in-depth study that has not yet been conducted.

I thank the hon. member for his question. In Quebec, this issue was examined. Some are in favour while others are opposed, as is the case elsewhere, but so far those who oppose the idea have been successful in ensuring that this option is not pursued any further.

I did not have time to mention it, but let not us forget the issue of individual rights and privacy. We are talking about a right. A right is not something that is negotiable. It is impossible to have half of a right. A right is a right. I think the minister should seek legal advice on this issue.

To my knowledge, and based on what I have seen and heard this morning, there is a lot of room for improvement in the minister's comments.

[*English*]

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I followed the comments made by the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois. He asked what kind of information would be on the ID card. Nobody knows what kind of information will be on the card, and that is the purpose of this discussion.

First, it is totally unfair to ask the minister or anyone on the very first day of discussion what kind of information will be on it. It would be up to him, up to me, up to everyone here and up to Canadians to tell us what they want on the card, if we have the card. I would like him to comment on that.

Second, last week we had a committee meeting. The member for Laval Centre gave an example, and the minister repeated the example again here today, that her credit card was stolen. She may be one of the victims of 12,000 fraud cases. The credit card was then used without her knowledge or approval. If it is possible that this ID card would prevent at least the vast majority of this kind of fraud and if we could prevent 12,000 cases of \$2.5 billion fraudulently charged to consumers, among other benefits, would it not be a worthwhile effort?

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Antoine Dubé: Mr. Speaker, obviously, this is a question that requires a detailed answer. The member's question is twofold.

I will answer the first part briefly. It is like in research. How do we find what we are looking for when we do not know what we are looking for?

This is to some extent the minister's problem. We get the impression that he is asking all and sundry for their opinion. It is hard to find something when one does not know what one wants.

Second, there is the issue of the card. When it comes to showing ID to prove who we are, there are many other ways to do so, such as a passport, driver's licence, and what not. The Quebec health insurance card has a picture on it. Student cards also. And, for even greater certainty, there are eye and finger prints.

This card could actually become very valuable to would-be fraud artists, who may want to steal this card which will contain even more information than the others. Is this not counterproductive? I think it is.

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I believe if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That notwithstanding Standing Order 87(2), the draw for private members' business which is scheduled to be held today at 1.15 p.m. be postponed until Thursday, February 27, 2003 at 1.15 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: The Deputy 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)

* * *

[Translation]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—INTRODUCTION OF A NATIONAL IDENTITY CARD

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this debate on the NDP motion is important. Even though the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration only referred to a take note debate before a decision is made, it seems to me that the proposed change calling for a compulsory national card is a fundamental change requiring serious consideration.

I must begin by quoting the Privacy Commissioner, who is appointed by the government and whose responsibility is to protect people's privacy. This quote is taken from his annual report dated January 29, 2003.

It is my duty, in this Annual Report, to present a solemn and urgent warning to every Member of Parliament and Senator, and indeed to every Canadian:

The fundamental human right of privacy in Canada is under assault as never before. Unless the Government of Canada is quickly dissuaded from its present course by Parliamentary action and public insistence, we are on a path that may well lead to the permanent loss not only of privacy rights that we take for granted but also of important elements of freedom as we now know it.

I continue with another quote from the Privacy Commissioner, Mr. Radwanski.

We face this risk because of the implications, both individual and cumulative, of a series of initiatives that the Government has mounted or is actively moving toward. These initiatives are set against the backdrop of September 11, and anti-terrorism is their purported rationale. But the aspects that present the greatest threat to privacy either have nothing at all to do with anti-terrorism, or they present no credible promise of effectively enhancing security.

Supply

The Government is, quite simply, using September 11 as an excuse for new collections and uses of personal information about all of us Canadians that cannot be justified by the requirements of anti-terrorism and that, indeed, have no place in a free and democratic society.

These are the comments made by the Privacy Commissioner, who reiterated what he had already said about many bills regarding which the need for such measures was never demonstrated.

The measures that he mentioned include the national ID card with various pieces of information, and possibly biometric identifiers.

As the hon. member for Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière pointed out, I have worked on the issue of privacy. This is a very interesting area that is not sufficiently talked about, particularly nowadays, given the oft-ignored power and capabilities of available tools and technology.

It seems to me that what Mr. Radwanski holds most important, what he says is a founding principle of Quebec and Canadian society, a principle that would be compromised by a mandatory ID card—that is what we are talking about, a mandatory national ID card—is the right to anonymity from the State. It is a fundamental privacy right.

Cards exist already. There are some in Quebec with photos. There was debate on whether there should or should not be a photo.

● (1230)

There are cards such as the health insurance card that I use when I go to the doctor so that I do not have to spend a dime. I have a card for when I am driving. Companies and banks sometimes ask us to identify ourselves. In that case, I have a choice from a number of cards. So far, no one has the right to ask for my social insurance number. I am free to give it if I want, but I can refuse.

That is the system we are living in right now. We are being asked to adopt a system where everyone would have a mandatory national ID card, a smart card—since the minister made a point of that—which could include a significant amount of data. He talked about fingerprints and biometric data.

A card is a major change in and of itself, but this type of card is a major breach of privacy. This would change the relationship between the citizen, society and the State.

No matter what information is put on such a card, the more important it is, the more worried we should be. Anyone could be asked to produce this type of card, anytime. We do not live under this type of regime. Before we talk about this type of card, let us talk about why we should live under this type of regime.

I cannot help but think that the minister, being the pragmatic person he is, is thinking about fulfilling demanding obligations coming from our neighbours. These obligations can only be imposed when we cross the border. There are other ways to meet these needs. There are ways other than forcing us in Quebec and in Canada to fundamentally change the way we interact with the world around us. Going for a walk in the evening with your dog and your boyfriend does not require carrying an identity card which you will be required to show if you meet someone, in uniform, or not.

Supply

This is a fundamental change, and I applaud the New Democratic Party for raising this issue today through this motion. As did my colleague, the member for Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, I would like to remind members that in Quebec, Mr. Trudel opposed this idea for the reasons I have given. Aware of the need to address security issues, he said that security must not limit the exercise of citizenship.

Some would say that we have to hunt down terrorists. It has been proven on many occasions that those who want to get around security, including a card such as this, have all kinds of sophisticated technical means to allow them to do so. A card can be forged or stolen. We need only look at the almighty Canadian passport, which has often been forged. Now there are attempts to make that more difficult.

We must not change a fundamental principle like the one we are talking about, on the off chance that we might be able to make it harder for possible terrorists, whom we can find, track and discover by other means.

• (1235)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a couple of comments and finish with a question.

The member referred often to the privacy commissioner. I happened to be on the committee that reviewed his appointment when he became the privacy commissioner. I remember asking the privacy commissioner the following question, "Since you are a journalist and journalism is not often associated with privacy rights, when exactly did you become interested in the privacy rights of Canadians?" He was honest in his answer. He said, "When they offered me the job". Therefore I do not think we should just suggest that this one person is a guru in the privacy industry.

I am aware that we have substantive problems with regard to identity fraud, health fraud and the processing of people through security checks, whether it be border crossing at the U.S. border or whether it be at airports going on non-domestic flights.

The cost of identity fraud is about \$2.5 billion. The cost of health fraud is estimated at \$3 billion to \$4 billion and maybe more, because we just do not know. Social insurance numbers exist far beyond the population of Canada. We have these problems.

The conclusion I would reach is that we have tremendous risk areas of cost losses or maybe opportunities lost because we are not correcting these problems. This provides an opportunity to recoup substantial revenues.

The members premise was that there is no relationship between the need to protect privacy and the threat of terrorism. I would submit and ask the member to comment whether she would not agree that if we were to eliminate the volume of checking of people who had smart cards that it would in fact free up the resources to do more comprehensive and effective security screening for those who do not have a card?

• (1240)

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, some arguments that are easy to make before legislation is passed can turn out to be extremely

difficult to maintain, once it is passed. I will not make an idle comparison with the gun registry; still, we do have to think about what we are doing.

I will answer my hon. colleague, with whom I enjoy discussing, by saying that his first question about Mr. Radwanski raises two in my mind. Why was he appointed by the government, if he was not reliable when it comes to protecting privacy? Second, I think that he is aware of just how much privacy is in jeopardy.

You know, for instance, that it has become common practice for Internet companies trying to get rid of hackers to hire hackers, because they know what to do.

He has not won me over with his arguments. I had the opportunity to work with him on Bill C -54. However, I have always appreciated hearing what he had to say.

As far as costs are concerned, let us say that certain people have an interest in saying that costs will indeed be substantially reduced. I would like someone to look seriously into that.

Nevertheless, it will still be necessary to assess any such reduction in costs against the fundamental change in our relationship to society. We must bear in mind that we will be moving from a system where there is no requirement to produce a card, if so requested, to one where we will be required to carry a card at all times.

I will need very strong assurances to convince me that it is worthwhile, as well as more reliable cost estimates than some we were given in the past.

[English]

Mr. Reg Alcock (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member referenced the Quebec experience relative to health cards. I believe the solution in that particular case, on a contentious issue, was a model to the rest of the country. The Quebec government said, yes, we are going to do it because we see it as a value proposition, but we are going to make it voluntary. If Quebecers want that service, then they accept the card. If they do not, they do not have to and they can still be served in another way.

Would the member's opinions on this card be different if it were a voluntary card as opposed to a mandatory card?

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I realize this is also being contemplated. However, I would suggest that my hon. colleagues give some thought to a voluntary card, which could become so desirable that people would want to get one. I feel that consideration should be given to a voluntary card, as a first step toward change, providing the same information as a mandatory card.

[English]

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with our House leader, the distinguished member for St. John's West.

We do not see the need for an identity card. We have passports, birth certificates, social insurance numbers, and so on. It seems to be an overall effort by the Liberals to increase their control over every aspect of our lives.

Mr. Speaker, I know you do not have much time, but if you want to have some fun watch the jobs.gc.ca job site. I watch it because it is really interesting. Just in the last little while I have noticed that 12 departments are advertising for intelligence analysts. They are the national defence, CCRA, citizenship and immigration—the department we are talking about today—foreign affairs, environment, industry, justice, RCMP, CSIS, transport, Parks Canada and even the Privy Council.

I do not know why they are doing this or why they need intelligence officers in all these departments, but it is kind of like the identity card. They want to be able to identify us and know where we go. We would have to swipe this card every time we go through a customs office, toll booth or whatever the heck they come up with. It is just control. They are control freaks. They want to control everything we do. They want to keep a handle on us and there is absolutely no reason to do it.

We have passports. As long as passports were controlled and not abused, and if the Liberals would enforce the passports and not allow them to be stolen, forged, duplicated and all those things, our passports would be all we would really need to travel outside the country. Inside the country we have all kinds of other things.

I have a firearms registration card and a driver's licence with my picture on it. I have a birth certificate and a passport. Why do I need another card and what is it for? I do not see the point in it at all. It is just another control issue for the Liberals so that they can find out where everybody is going, what they are doing, what they are spending, and who knows with whom they would share that information. Who knows what country they will share that information with. We will never know because they will never tell us.

The information commissioner raises all kinds of concerns about it as far as the privacy goes. He lays out all kinds of opportunities for the data and the privacy of our personal lives to be abused. He projects that it would be used to monitor our activities. Why does the government want to monitor our activities? It does not need to monitor our activities. But again, it wants to have another document, another control by the government, and another opportunity to have a document that is forged, abused and misused, and not looked after at all. Talk about big brother. This is like having a whole family of big brothers overseeing everything we do. It is just unnecessary.

Just because we do not think it is necessary does not mean we should not have it. On the other hand, it is like Jack Nicholson would say, "You can't handle it". The Liberals could not handle this thing. They have completely botched up the firearms registration that stands still. They cannot move around and do anything on their own. But we are talking about identity cards for 30 million people who move around, do things and if they cannot control a registry system for some stationary firearms, how are they ever going to control identity cards for people? They have completely botched that exercise.

Supply

I had a man in my riding who registered one gun. He got five different certificates. Imagine if I were to send in my identity application, I would probably receive five different identities. Would that happen? It is the same people who brought us the firearms registration.

I have a doctor in Springhill who registered five guns and he got three registrations. I suppose a person with a family of five, three out of five is not bad. The whole point is that the Liberals cannot handle it. They could not look after it if they had to, even if we all agreed to let them invent an identity card. They could not possibly do it and they have proven it.

● (1245)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member enjoys having a little fun with us, but in fairness the member said that he had a passport, a birth certificate, a SIN card, a driver's licence and a health card, so why would he want another card. It shows that he just does not get it. The fact is he would not need another card. All other cards would be replaced by one card. That would reduce his wallet by about half the width it is now.

The member from Winnipeg raised the issue of mandatory versus voluntary. On the practical side, if we have a problem with social insurance numbers, in that there are more out there than there should be, or health care fraud or identity fraud, all costing us a lot of money, why not look to the example of the Nexus system they use at the Samia-Windsor border? People who work on one side versus the other can go through a process, get clearance and can quickly get to where they have to go. It frees up the line and allows the people who do security checks more opportunity to do a better job with people who do not frequently travel.

The member rhetorically asked the question of why they would want to know when we were moving around. There has been tremendous evidence regarding those who have committed terrorist crimes around the world. Their patterns of travel by air and the number of times they visited were clear signs that this was a high risk scenario.

I pose those to the member from the standpoint of practicality. There is tremendous potential for cost savings and for security. If voluntary, it is not a privacy issue anymore. It really is an efficiency and smart thing to do.

● (1250)

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member says that I do not get it. I do not want to get it and I do not want it. Let me make that clear.

Supply

It is interesting that the member stands and questions me on this stuff. A minute ago he questioned the previous speaker on the validity of the privacy commissioner. He said that the privacy commissioner knew nothing about privacy. His party hired him. Why did the government hire him if he was the wrong person for the job? He just said that.

He also repeated what I said about having a passport, a birth certificate and a driver's licence. He said that he did not get it, that this card would replace everything. Is this card going to replace my passport? I do not think so. Are we going to go from country to country with an ID card when everyone else has a passport? Canadians will have a plastic card? I do not think so. I do not think he knows what he is talking about.

The other thing is he just confirmed that the Liberals want to control the information about where we move around. He just said that it is important that they know where people go. Again it is big brother. They want to know where we are, what we are doing and where we are going, and I do not want them to know.

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Mr. Speaker, one important thing to remember in this debate is that the United States does not have that card and it does not want it. Evidence of that is in the homeland security package. Security in the U.S. is a big deal as we well know. The Americans are preoccupied with homeland security. In the bill that created the department, it states, "Nothing in this act should be construed to authorize the development of a national identification system or card". The Americans are against it. Why should we have one? There is no logical reason.

The other point is there are 100 countries in the world that have it but it has made no appreciable difference in the level of security in those countries. It is not working.

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, the answer is simple. We should not have the ID card. We do not need the ID card. We have a passport that is well respected and honoured around the world. That is all we need for our international travel.

Again it is just an effort by the Liberals to control everything we do. The member across the way has said that it is important that they know where everybody is and what they are doing all the time.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for sharing his time with me.

The member for Mississauga South is such a salesman that it is too bad he cannot participate again in the debate. We have all seen the great Mastercard commercial on television. This is what he reminds us of, everything else costs so much, but this one is priceless. According to the member we will not need a health care card, or a driver's licence, or a dental card, or any regular credit cards, or Woolco card. All we will need is this one card that will get us anywhere in the world and we will have no more problems.

The member then goes on to say that they want to ensure they know where we go. It is the old 1970s big brother show. This is information that the government would have would undoubtedly be shared with CSIS, the FBI, the CIA and the KGB. This is a great card, a tremendous card to protect our privacy.

The funny thing about this, and believe me it is funny, is the whole thing is becoming a charade. The debate today is like a comedy show. It is not because this is not a serious issue. Protecting our identity and our privacy is extremely important and having proper and secure access is important.

Why is it so funny? There are a number of things. First, let me mention a couple of comments that have been made and arguments used by members opposite. They have said that getting into the United States is not as easy as it once was.

Recently I have been in the United States quite often, as have other members, and I have not even had to show my passport. If entry does tighten up a bit, undoubtedly Canadians will be required to show a passport which everyone has or can easily get, if they are going to travel. If I will not be travelling, then why do I need a passport?

If 90% or 50% of Canadians are not travelling, then why do they need secure documentation at a cost to the Canadian public?

We talked about credit card fraud. Maybe more onus should be put on the credit card companies to ensure that their cards are more foolproof. If they are subject to losses because they have to pay, rather than the person who holds the card, they will quickly find a way of coming up with a card that protects their money.

Let us go back to the gun registration. I think that is perhaps why this debate is so ludicrous and why it has become a comedy hour. Everyone across the country, not only here in the House, is looking at the fact that the Liberals are proposing to introduce a card. Now everybody has to be registered, not only those who have guns, and will have a specific card.

That card will do everything. It will register Canadians for their health plan, for driving, for shopping, for banking, for travel and for their security according to the Liberals. When the gun registration was brought in, how many criminals, the ones the government set out to get, really registered their guns? Were all criminals registering their guns? Of course, the answer is no. The gun registry did not do what it was supposed to do.

Also look at our passports. Why are we having trouble with passports? Mainly because of the incompetency of the governing department. It is mismanagement. We have people walking out with arm loads of blank passports. The department cannot account for them. This is why an ID card is so ludicrous, particularly in relation to gun control.

Perhaps somewhere in the ratio 1 in 15 people own a gun and probably have registered it. There is no problem at all. A few Canadians who own guns will register them at a cost to the taxpayer of \$2 million.

Supply

•(1255)

The whole thing is in a mess and it has cost over \$1 billion to date. We will see a bill rammed through this House on Monday to give government another \$15 million which, the experts say, will develop new software to correct the mistakes. The Liberals think the complexities are so great that they cannot do it, but they will waste \$15 million just to see. Then of course that just straightens out the computerized part of it, we think.

Then they will have to go on from there at perhaps \$100 million or \$120 million, again these are estimates, a year for *X* number of years. That is to register guns. If we have to multiply that by 15, build in the complexities of what this card is supposed to cover and leave it in the hands of the same incompetents, imagine what this will cost the Canadian taxpayer?

We have a lot of people across the country registering long guns because they feel they have to obey the law and for no other reason. It is not because they agree with gun control. Hand guns and other guns that would be used in crime should be registered and controlled. I have no problem with that. Why register long guns which most people have always used for hunting and whatever? It is an idiotic idea.

Instead of dealing with the types of guns criminals use so the rest of us will be protected, the Liberals have done the reverse. They have made criminals out of law-abiding citizens if they do not register their guns, but have been unable to deal with the criminal element whatsoever. If that happens with this small, one in 15 example of registration and control, imagine if everybody in the country had to be registered. It is just idiotic.

I have a couple of points. Experts say that a massive central database of information will be needed to run such a scheme and the task of keeping this accurate and up to date will be enormous. If it is that complicated compared to a simple gun registry, what will we be talking about in the House this time next year?

That is why here in the House and across the country the opinion is that this is so idiotic. The United States has said "No way, José would we look at such a card because of the complexities". However it can be done in Canada because we already have done it with the gun registry. Look where that got us. Now we will register everybody.

People from coast to coast are laughing and not because they think the idea of having some security is not serious. It is because the government has the nerve, after what happened in relation to the gun registry, to bring in another bill to register everybody in Canada in a much more complex environment than the gun registration.

Perhaps that is enough to put on the record. Undoubtedly a decision will be made on this quickly, as it should be.

•(1300)

Mr. Reg Alcock (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with some interest to what the member opposite had to say as he rejected any thought, any discourse or any debate on this topic. I agree with some of his concerns about government moving in this direction at this time and I will speak about that later in debate.

A whole series of changes have taken place in the world in which we and our constituents, the people we serve, live. They have served to do various things to diminish personal privacy, because privacy is largely a myth right now given the pervasive nature of the kind of tools that we use to live our lives. Tremendous benefits have come to us through creative uses of technology in other aspects of our lives, benefits and efficiencies that are not received through government.

Is the hon. member opposed to the nature of a compulsory national identity card, or is he just generally opposed to government having anything to do with technology?

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. It is like the old question that is asked quite often, "Would you buy a used car from this person?" Would you buy any kind of a registration card from this government? That is part of it and that is part of the turn-off. There is absolutely no doubt about that.

However, compulsory registration of everybody? No. There is no way anyone should support that. It would be up to individuals themselves as to whether or not they feel they need the card.

We talk about this card as if this is going to be the one thing that will ensure privacy and secrecy. The social insurance cards were supposed to do the same thing and we have what, 1.5 million cards unaccounted for, maybe again because of the incompetency of government but also because of the expertise of the criminal element that can end up duplicating everything. How often have people been told that their credit cards are safe or that their bank cards are safe or whatever? Nothing is safe.

Perhaps if government developed and showed us the costs of a card that would provide us with the type of security everybody talks about and we knew what we were getting into, then those who want to avail themselves of such services could.

Other than that, until that happens, until we see the products, until we see the wounds, nobody is going to buy in. A lot of it, again I say to the member, is not because of the idea of being secure and safe and people having their privacy protected, but because of the incompetency of the way in which this has been handled, particularly by the present government.

•(1305)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the debate has generally identified that mandatory identity cards would pose a more serious threat to privacy considerations than a voluntary card.

My question for the member is this. On the presumption that this would be voluntary and since there is about \$3 billion to \$5 billion of health care fraud a year, does he believe that a card which would have a person's health card number, picture, and possibly even other disclosures a person may want to make, such as blood type, allergies, who to contact in the case of an emergency, et cetera, might not be a bad idea as a starting point?

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If that is the case, then can he envision extrapolating it to include other information with regard to personal identification, which would be able to be fast tracked through border points or international airline travel so that the volume of security check activity could be alleviated by those who would have already pre-cleared themselves?

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Speaker, now we have taken away the toque, the hockey stick and the tape and we are just down to the cost of the sweater, I guess, in relation to the MasterCard.

Let me say to the member that I do not think there is anybody in the House who would not rather have some kind of secure system that would protect our privacy and identity, if it were possible. However, when the member talks about what the card can do, in order for me or anybody else to be able to access this card for these complexities just imagine the type of complicated back-up technology that would be required to put such a card in play.

Whenever we get into something like this, the first thing we have to do, if we are responsible keepers of the taxpayers' money here, is a cost benefit analysis. It is too bad we did not do it with gun control. If we do it with this and the government can come back with something worthwhile, we might have a different type of debate in the House.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Winnipeg Centre, who I am sure will have many brilliant comments to make on this subject.

I must admit that I rise today with mixed emotions. The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has asked the country to engage in this debate on national identity cards. The unfortunate part of it, which we have heard in the debate so far, is that there is just so much speculation as to what form this card would take. Would it be voluntary? Would it be mandatory? Would the public have to pay for it or would the government assume that cost? How much would it cost? Would it be a card based on just a picture, or would it have fingerprints on it, or would we try to do something more technologically advanced? The list of questions goes on.

On Monday of this week, part of the citizenship and immigration committee met in Toronto. I had the opportunity to sit in on those hearings. One of the issues we were discussing, one of the topics, to take up the minister's suggestion, was the use of these cards and whether or not they make sense. We heard from several members of the public there, both as individuals and as representatives of groups. After they made their presentations, I asked all of them if any of them could give me a good reason for the card and if in fact we should proceed with it. All three representatives who were there answered no. They could not see a good reason for it and were definite that we should not proceed with it.

One of the members of a delegation was Morris Manning, a well known criminal lawyer practising in Toronto, but whose reputation I think covers the whole of the country given some of the work he has done over his many years of practising law. He gave us a thick lawyer's brief covering a great many of the issues and addressing some of the points. I want to give him credit because a number of the answers, suggestions and points I will be giving today come from some of the issues he raised.

We heard from the minister that one of the reasons for introducing this card is that it would in some fashion reduce racial profiling in the country. I do not understand that. I have had some very extensive background work done on this issue in my riding, because my riding is on the border and I regularly see the consequences of the racial profiling that has been instituted on the American side, first formally and now informally. Just so that I am clear on this, that racial profiling is particularly directed toward people who come from the Middle East, northern Africa, Pakistan and India.

A card of this kind will do absolutely nothing to deal with the issue of racial profiling. The discrimination that goes on, and the abuse and humiliation that people suffer, will continue unabated. If someone is an aboriginal member of society in Canada, nothing will be done to ameliorate their situation as far as racial profiling on reserves is concerned and the discrimination they suffer from. If someone is an Afro Canadian and in downtown Toronto, having this card will do absolutely nothing to reduce the racial profiling and the consequences that the Afro Canadian community suffers from.

The minister's position on this is in fact without merit. I will go further and say that the card will move that racial profiling off the streets, away from our airports. It will not just happen there or at the border. It will be happening in boardrooms, on paper and in our computers, because people will be identified by their name alone as being from some other group that we want to discriminate against. There is no merit at all in this position.

• (1310)

Already we have heard, just in the last few minutes, that somehow we should be using the card as a way of dealing with consumer fraud. There are two answers to that. It is not our responsibility as a government to be dealing with that problem. That is a problem that has to be dealt with by the people who are giving out the credit. It is their responsibility, not the government's. The second point is that it does not work. Every time an advance is made, the criminal element figures a way around it, so it is not going to be a solution. Also, when we look at what the potential negative consequences are of having that kind of card in circulation, there is no way we should be going down that road.

There has been what I can only call a ridiculous suggestion that somehow the card will be used as an alternative to or replacement for passports. We are involved in an international protocol and international treaties with the rest of the globe, I think without exception, for the passport system. It is an international system. The introduction of an identity card in Canada is not in any way going to provide an alternative to that system. If we hear that there is some suggestion that the whole globe is going to get together and introduce an international identity card as a replacement for passports, then maybe we could be looking at that system but that is not what we are talking about at all. The globe is not looking at that kind of a system, so that argument as to why we should have a national identity card also goes down the tubes.

Let me go to the other side. Why should we not have these types of cards? The essential and fundamental answer to that is in fact the fundamental rights and freedoms we have in our country. The right to move around is recognized in the charter, our mobility right, our right to move around in our society without being confronted by authority in whatever form, whether it be police officers or school authorities and so on, asking to see our documents. That is a system we see in police states, not in Canada.

Why should we not do it? Again we hear that the technology is so well advanced that we can make it foolproof. I made the point earlier that this in fact is not the case. More specifically, we hear about the iris scan or some other type of biometric methodology. People are watching too much TV and too much science fiction. We do not have those systems. They do not exist. There is no technology at this time that allows us to do this. Those cards do not exist. I repeat, that technology does not exist. It does not exist in this country and does not exist anywhere on the globe.

An hon. member: That's not so.

Mr. Joe Comartin: It is so, but given the knowledge on the other side of the Chamber, Mr. Speaker, I should ignore them.

There is one more point that Mr. Manning made, and I want to go back and acknowledge the work he has done, which I think is very helpful to this discussion. He did look around the globe. He looked at some other countries that have looked at this in their court systems. Specifically, although he said they were not the only ones, he drew to our attention both the Philippines and Hungary, which have taken the issue of a national identity card all the way up to their supreme courts, their courts of final decision making. In both of those cases they were found to be unconstitutional. My question was why not, and this, I believe, will not survive a challenge under the charter. We cannot impose this on our system.

My final point is that both England and the United States have given consideration to this. England is currently looking at it and, as Canada is so far, is getting very negative reactions to the concept. The U.S., as we heard in one of the earlier commentaries, has in fact rejected it. It attempted a few years ago to expand its driver's licence system into a national identity card. It was shot down overwhelmingly in that country. The countries that we are most close to in terms of our jurisprudence and our legislation have rejected it or are about to do so.

• (1315)

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member spoke about racial profiling of Canadians of Arab origin. I have seen him at many Canadian Arab functions. I am sure he agrees with me that most Canadians of Arab origin are very upset with the U.S. policy to ask only them to be fingerprinted. I am one of them. When I cross the border I must be fingerprinted despite the fact that I have been a citizen here for 35 years and I am a member of Parliament, but the law says because I was born in a certain country I have to be fingerprinted.

The discussion we are having about proposed ID cards which we may or may not have in the future cannot prevent racial profiling of Canadian citizens at the border.

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Would the member still oppose the fact that I cannot cross the border like anybody else in the House without having to be fingerprinted because of my place of birth? Would he support the concept that I be equal to him when I cross the border to the United States because I would have an ID card as would he? My thumbprint, as the minister said, does not have a colour, religion or faith. My thumbprint is mine. Nobody can fake that. It is the same for the member. He could cross the border based on his thumbprint and I could cross the border based on my thumbprint.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, it will not work. The Americans will not recognize that. If someone has a criminal record and is pardoned in this country, they will not recognize that. They have already decided they will not do that.

The other reality is that the card does not protect someone from informal racial profiling.

I rose in the House on a number of occasions and challenged the Minister of Foreign Affairs to deal with this issue, to complain to the Americans, to protest, because of the humiliation and the abuse that was occurring at the border, particularly to people of Arab and Muslim backgrounds. I was brushed off most of the time by the minister.

The reality finally got through to the U.S. and it has backed off in the formal programs, but informal discrimination and racial profiling is going on.

One of my constituents, a very fair featured woman with black hair, a citizen of Canada for 12 years and a resident for about 16 years, was constantly being stopped at the border as she went back and forth every day to work in the United States. She could not figure out why. Finally she realized it was because she still had a Middle Eastern accent. That is how they were identifying her. One day she happened to be wearing a crucifix, because she is Christian not Muslim, and she was not stopped that day. From then on she wore a crucifix when she went across the border.

Is that what we will have to do? That is the alternative to the card if we are to really try and deal with it. That is what is happening at the border and the card will not change that one iota.

• (1320)

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on some of my colleague's statements. First, I believe I heard the member correctly in that he referred to the card as being either voluntary or mandatory. I can assure him that if it is a national card it would be like the social insurance card and it would have to be mandatory for it to work properly.

There was one statement that really kind of shook me and I would like the minister to explain. I believe I heard the member say that consumer fraud was not the business of government. I thought the function of government was to protect its citizens and the government has to move to do something. Above all, our citizens should be protected from consumer fraud. Consumer fraud is not just the business of those conducting the fraud.

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian: He is not a minister.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, that is right, I am not a minister and I certainly would not want to be a minister in that government.

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To deal seriously with the question, the member is correct in that the government does have a role. However, prevention is the responsibility of the people issuing that credit. That is not anything the government can effectively do anything with.

Sure the government has a responsibility. Consumer fraud is a crime. Under the Criminal Code there is a responsibility to make it a crime and to enforce it in our courts.

The point I was making is that the issue of prevention of consumer fraud is not one that should be the government's responsibility. It should be the responsibility of the company that is issuing the credit to those individuals.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity to speak to the NDP opposition day motion which states:

That, in the opinion of this House, the introduction of national identity card offends the principle of privacy and other civil rights of Canadians and this House therefore opposes its introduction.

I am proud that it was our House leader, the member for Vancouver East, who introduced the motion, seconded by the member for Winnipeg—Transcona. Both have spoken very well on the subject and have articulated clearly what some of the NDP's reservations are about the introduction of such a measure.

I thank my colleague from Windsor—St. Clair for sharing his time with me and for so eloquently speaking to this subject just a moment ago.

I will open my remarks, as have some of the other members, with a quote from the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, George Radwanski, not just because he puts the point so well but because it gets up the noses of the Liberal MPs so effectively. Some clearly disapprove of Mr. Radwanski's comments. His comments irritate them, so it is all the more reason for me to dwell on them extensively in my speech.

In 2002, Mr. Radwanski in a speech to the Arthur Kroeger College of Public Affairs said that in a free society:

We need to make loss of privacy the exception, not the new way of doing business. And we need to have an attitudinal change that both recognizes the threats and places limits on them. The burden of proof must always be on those who say that a new intrusion on privacy is necessary to meet some important social need. Every such proposal should be calmly and carefully assessed on its own merit. It should be tested against four key criteria.

It is important to put these tests forward here today. We must ask ourselves if the introduction of national identification cards will meet these tests to see if the cards are truly necessary or if there is merit to them.

The first test that Mr. Radwanski suggested is, is there a demonstrable necessity to address some specific problem? What is the goal, what is the objective, what is the Liberal government seeking to achieve? We have not really heard clearly from the Liberal members to date, other than the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration who pointed out that for the narrow purposes of the immigration file, he sees the need in terms of immigration.

Second, is it demonstrably likely to be effective in addressing that problem? We have heard members, such as the member from St. John's, Newfoundland, who seriously doubt whether the introduction

of the card would even achieve what few specifics the Liberal government was willing to share with us. It was pointed out as well the very real concern that the introduction of the card by the government's own estimates would cost about \$3.6 billion and that is if everything went perfectly smoothly. If recent examples are any indication, such as the disaster of the gun registry, we could expect cost overruns of god knows how much over that \$3.6 billion.

Surely it is not demonstrably likely to be effective in addressing even the narrow range of problems that have been brought to our attention by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Third, is the reduction in privacy proportional to the benefit to be derived? Most of us would argue that in a free society the minimizing and trivializing of the issue of privacy is not equal to any benefit that might be derived.

Fourth, is there no other less privacy invasive alternative that could accomplish the same purpose? In other words, have we exhausted every other avenue of recourse to achieve the goals as outlined or the reasons that ID cards should be put forward? I would say that the answer is no, that we have not exhausted this idea.

We have seen member after member rise today to express concern at the loss of privacy, the erosion of our personal freedoms, and the very things by which we define ourselves as Canadians. We have heard very little from the government side as to why these cards would be necessary, other than a professed convenience. We would be lumping all of the other forms of ID into one information card.

• (1325)

Some people are offended even more than I. People were speaking to me in the lobby, asking why we would stop at this national ID card, why not have a microchip implanted under our skin and we could pass by some kind of a screen and the government would have all the information it needed on all of us. Another even more cynical person said we should have a tattoo of a bar code on our forearm and it could be scanned. Maybe having it across our foreheads would be more applicable, especially in the case of the member for Winnipeg South. It would cover up part of his expansive forehead.

Many people view the introduction of a national ID card in much the same vein as these comments about a microchip or a bar code. I guess it is clear from all of the speakers here that Canadians are not willing to forfeit any of the personal freedoms we enjoy as Canadian citizens, especially when no one has made the case as to why it is necessary to do so. We should always tread very carefully when we go down the slippery slope of the erosion of personal freedoms in this country. In the absence of a compelling argument as to why it is necessary, we probably will follow the lead of other countries like Australia and the United Kingdom which have considered this issue, contemplated it, given it serious debate and rejected the idea.

I suppose that using our opposition day motion is pre-emptive in a way. We are hoping to convince the ruling party that Canadians stand fairly united and have reached a fair consensus that this is an intrusion into their personal freedoms that they are not willing to accept.

Other speakers before me have mentioned valuable comments from one of the country's leading constitutional lawyers, Morris Manning. He recently joined immigrant and multicultural groups in denouncing the proposal for a national identity card. He said that Hungary's constitution bans it and it has been ruled illegal in the Philippines. These are countries that contemplated the introduction of such a card. As I said, the government of Australia nearly collapsed over plans to introduce such a card 15 years ago. Mr. Manning warned the immigration committee chair that the ID cards would increase racial profiling, would do little to combat terrorism or identify fraud, and would invade people's privacy by creating a huge database of information.

As a Manitoban, I have a graphic illustration of how personal data can be compromised. When the Filmon Tory government was in power, it privatized and contracted out, sold if you will, the health data on Manitobans, the private personal information about their personal health. The government contracted that out to a private firm, much against the hue and cry of many Manitobans.

That firm, as companies will do, then merged and was sold to another American firm. Now my personal health information is in the hands of a private company in Houston, Texas. I do not know if it is going to sell my personal health information to a drug company that might want to solicit me to buy a certain product, or sell that database to a magazine subscription company. How do we know, once it gets into that realm, if it is really secure?

There is no perfectly secure database system that cannot be compromised. The more important data that is put on that card, the more interesting it is for those who would have nefarious purposes for that card to access that information and steal it. It makes it a target for those who have the wherewithal to compromise the cards.

• (1330)

Mr. Reg Alcock (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tempted as I am to respond to the health questions and point out that the member's health information is only as secure as the lock on the dumpster behind his doctor's office, let me venture into the civil liberties debate.

I too have a quote from a civil libertarian, Alan Dershowitz, from the Harvard law school. He said:

Finally, there is the question of the right to anonymity. I don't believe we can afford to recognize such a right in this age of terrorism. No such right is hinted at in the Constitution. And though the Supreme Court has identified a right to privacy, privacy and anonymity are not the same.... A national ID card could actually enhance civil liberties by reducing the need for racial and ethnic stereotyping.... From a civil liberties perspective, I prefer a system that takes a little bit of freedom from all to one that takes a great deal of freedom and dignity from the few.

How would the member for Winnipeg Centre respond to that?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, that is the very question that I was just asking myself. Actually the two competing authorities that were quoted, Manning and the authority that the member for Winnipeg South quotes, went at each other on that very issue and disagree. There were two opposing points of view.

In my point of view we do not compromise personal freedoms. I believe that freedom and dignity are things that we can afford and maintain in this country. We do not have to sell or compromise them to achieve greater safety in the community. I do not believe that we

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have exhausted every avenue of recourse in terms of tightening up the Canadian system as it pertains to terrorism and I do not accept the argument that the national ID card would take us any further down that road to safety and security within our borders.

I do not buy the argument, and I do not even hear the argument being made by the Liberals, why sacrificing personal freedoms or how sacrificing them would make us any safer or more secure. If I were to hear a compelling argument from them I may even be willing to concede that we could give up that little bit.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I noted the question posed to my colleague from Winnipeg Centre by the member for Winnipeg South. While I am not trying to respond to his question, I think he needs to be reminded that Privacy Commissioner George Radwanski, who has spoken extensively on the topic, stated quite clearly that the right to be anonymous is at the very core of human dignity, autonomy and freedom, and that we should resist the idea of being fingerprinted for a national identifier. However benignly it starts it might require us to show our papers on request at any time, sort of an internal passport.

I would ask the member for Winnipeg Centre about the position as we understand it at this point with respect to our neighbours, the United States. It is being suggested to us that actually we may have to do this in the end because this may be what the U.S. demands of us.

Could the member comment on the fact that the United States, we are told by a *Globe and Mail* editorial earlier this week on the same subject, is so wary of such a card that congress actually inserted the following line in the bill creating the U.S. department of homeland security. It said:

Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize the development of a national identification system or card.

Could the member for Winnipeg Centre comment on the argument that seems to find a lot of favour with Liberal members these days, that in the end we would just have to do what the U.S. wants us to do so we might as well give up the fight?

• (1335)

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, as the member for Halifax said, there does seem to be some contradiction. The Americans see themselves as rugged individualists, an Ayn Rand type of school of philosophy that they themselves would never compromise their freedom and dignity in such a way.

In fact, if we were to raise the idea of them having to carry their papers to go out to buy a newspaper at the corner store, they would be horrified, but yet they seem to be putting some pressure on this country, that they want Canadians to be identifiable in that way.

The hon. member raises an important point, that they even have a clause in their homelands security bill that says:

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Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize the development of a national identification system or card.

However, we do feel the pressure. The editorial in the *Globe and Mail* on Tuesday, February 11, acknowledged that senators like Hillary Clinton have openly and publicly expressed concern that Canadians should be easily identified and labelled et cetera. It does make us wonder where the motivation comes from. The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is introducing this when he cannot put forward a good case or argument as to why it is necessary. What then is compelling him to do this at this time?

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the motion before the House reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the introduction of a national identity card offends the principle of privacy and other civil rights of Canadians and this House therefore opposes its introduction.

There is no bill, motion or private member's item to be introduced. Maybe he could agree with me to add the words, "possibility of introduction" or "discussion of national identity card" rather than making a firm statement saying "introduction of national identity card" because there is nothing being introduced.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I do not think we are interested in entertaining that as a friendly amendment at this time. Negotiations like that are usually done behind the curtains.

Mr. Reg Alcock (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am saddened, but frankly not surprised by the tenor of the debate today. It is an incredibly important debate. It is one I suspect that we are going to come back to frequently over the next few years.

I would say that by and large I agree with many of the fears that have been raised on the other side and I will come back to them in some detail. I think they may lie at the heart of this.

The issue of forms of unique identifiers and the use of technology in public space is an incredibly important issue. It is an issue that I research and work with a great deal, both in the U.S. and in Canada.

I am not surprised by the fear. Fear is encountered all over the place. I have a little thing I do with crowds when I talk about this. I ask them to imagine themselves going to a group of their friends and starting a conversation on government use of information technology. How many lines would have to be spoken before the words "Big Brother" or "George Orwell" would be on the table or raised? This malevolent, all controlling, destructive image of government is a very powerful image. The problem is that there is no other image.

We do not have this light, cuddly, and citizen friendly view of government. It does not exist. When members say things such as, "I do not trust the government to do this", I say that I agree with them. I do not trust governments just yet to do this. When they say, "I do not think they have the technological competence", and there are examples of that, I agree with them. I think those are good arguments.

Unfortunately, the text of the motion that was put forward seems to be a 21st century equivalent of book burning. We will not talk and think about it. It is wrong. Do not do it. Let us back away. And that is also wrong.

Part of this is rooted in a human tendency to fear change, to fear difference, and to fear thinking about how we might do things in a different manner. Part of it is a fear of technology. Most of the members in the House are of an age cohort who did not grow up with technology. They do not have that kind of day-to-day comfort that our children are acquiring right now.

It is interesting in that context, and if we think about the world wide web, that the most recent version of the Internet that most people know, really did not go live until after the government was in office. Netscape, which was the first truly consumer friendly graphical interface, was launched in November 1994. It is that recent. Our capacity to adapt, enhance, and to integrate what all these changes and new powers mean are quite limited.

I am not concerned or I am not saddened so much by the fears that come up here. I think there are grounds to have those fears.

I am, though, concerned about the nature of public debate. How do we, people who represent the citizens of Canada, have a discussion about a topic like this that just does not dissolve into they are bad, we are bad? We will just harangue each other with old images that fit old stereotypes without ever getting down to saying that there might be some ways in which we could do some things differently that would enhance government, that would make government more transparent, and that would make government more accountable.

It is passing strange to me, frankly, that a couple of members have spoken and referenced the current Privacy Commissioner as an authority on this. This is the same Privacy Commissioner when the access to information commissioner said that members should be allowed to see the schedule of the Prime Minister as an accountability measure. This Privacy Commissioner beat him up for it, for something that can be done in other countries.

This Privacy Commissioner, if we note editorial opinion around the country, does not have the kind of credibility necessary to champion a cause as important as privacy. I think the right to a private life separate from government is a right. It is a right that is not extended in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but it should be. I think the right to privacy is my right to do things separate from my government and without its control and direction.

Historically, though, it has been confused also with the right to anonymity. My right to practice my religion in certain contexts in the not too recent past may have imposed a price on me that I did not want to pay, an ability to get a job or in some more odious cases in pre-war Germany, much more serious consequences.

Supply

• (1340)

The right to my exercise of private freedoms were often confused with anonymity and secrecy and I think it has created problem. What is one of the big problems in public management today? What is one of the big problems in how citizens or legislators relate to government? It is the virtual impenetrability of government. It is the culture of secrecy that exists within our public service. It is the inability to see what is happening in government.

What is the answer whenever one tries to expose that information? It is that the information could not be accumulated because it would violate privacy. Privacy gets used as a protection in a club to prevent good democratic leadership and good public accountability.

The other thing that is important to think about is that privacy in the form of anonymity is largely a myth. We give it up every day. I am one who weeds out the cards that I carry because I hate to carry a lot of plastic in my pocket. I think I carry a minimum of 16 cards. I carry one for my health plan, one credit card, one bank card, an Air Miles card, and a Safeway club card because I can easily go in and get all kinds of discounts when I buy groceries for my family. In doing that, I give up a huge amount of personal information in terms of my buying patterns, my consumption habits and all of that. That is the purpose of those cards.

In private space we are only beginning to get our heads around what this does to our rights to exist as individuals separate from either the demands and desires of the company or of government. The concept of privacy that we see promulgated by our current Privacy Commissioner, and as I hear repeatedly on this side of the House, is that it simply does not exist. It is government in a number of forums and other organizations. It is argued that credit card companies know more about us than anyone else because they can see where people are and what they do on a daily basis.

Because of our instant reaction to privacy good-change bad, we have not allowed ourselves to explore how privacy could be, and I would argue needs to be, reconceptualized to deliver the right of privacy to all citizens, but allow us to enhance our right to hold our government to account. I see a reconceptualization of this as an enhancement of democracy and our rights as citizens.

When we look at the narrow issue of the identity card, I agree. I am an agnostic on this. The establishment of one unique identifier that is mine and mine alone has a huge advantage in terms of the kinds of changes that could come about in terms of my ease of service. I like the Quebec model, which was essentially a voluntary model, that said people could simply sign up for it and they did not want it, they did not have to have it. People had the right to refuse and remain anonymous.

For this I applaud the minister. He is a personal friend of mine. I know he has thought about and struggled a lot with this. He genuinely sees this not as sneaking in some form of public policy. He says this is an important issue. He can see a value to it and is saying he wants to have a discussion about it. If the discussion were to simply spend a few hours saying it is a bad thing and we should never discuss it again, I think we would have missed a huge opportunity. The House should take up the challenge and members from all sides should spend some time focusing on this.

I am reminded and should inform the House that I am splitting my time with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

The establishment of a national unique identifier is an important enhancement to public life in Canada. There are four preconditions for me: first, that we take the reform of government and public management seriously; second, that we enhance public accountability through reorganizing and changing the laws and structures that govern how we hold public information; third, that we strengthen democratic leadership and accountability from the public side to this chamber; and fourth that we challenge the culture of secrecy that exists within the public service and that we accelerate. We have a chance now. There is new legislation on the table on access to information. There is a chance to review the privacy legislation.

• (1345)

I think we should take up that challenge and review both those bills with an eye to centring both of those important pieces of legislation around the rights of citizens. I think that within that we will find that having a unique way of identifying citizens will be a huge enhancement to the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of the government that we as Canadians enjoy.

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, of course I dispute the premise on which the member is justifying this national ID card. Of all the cards that he mentioned he has in his wallet, only the social insurance number card is imposed by the government and of course it is restricted in its use to delivering social benefits. It cannot really be used for anything else.

The national ID card is one that in fact creates a type of police state. In this regard the member mentioned George Orwell and Big Brother. The government would require individuals to possess a national ID card. The police would have the right to demand that card from somebody innocently walking down the street. There would be no reason other than the fact that people would have to have the card and the police would have the right to demand it. There would of course be a penalty for not having a card. An investigation would start and presumably an arrest would be made because the person would be detained until fully checked out. If an investigation were to show that the person did not have an ID card the penalty would be a fine or possibly jail. To me, that does equate to a police state, to a big brother, to an infringement on our personal liberties.

I would ask the member to address that. Would there not have to be a mechanism to force Canadians to have that card, and if they did not have it, would they not be jailed?

Supply

• (1350)

Mr. Reg Alcock: Mr. Speaker, 3 of the 16 cards I have in my wallet are in fact government cards. For example, I have my health card, my birth certificate and my driver's licence. Nobody suggests that it is an infringement on my privacy rights to have a driver's licence that the police can demand.

Mr. Howard Hilstrom: You do not have to have that, though.

Mr. Reg Alcock: But if I wish to exercise certain activities I have to have it.

The member said that it would be a requirement to have a national ID card, a requirement to possess it and a requirement that it be produced for police on demand. He said there would be a penalty, possibly including jail time, for not having it. Where is that written? I have read the minister's speech and statement and have discussed this with him, and nowhere can I find that. Maybe that is the Alliance view as to how this kind of policy would be delivered.

That is not what is being addressed here. What is being addressed here is that it is time for us to stop saying that the way to deal with things is not to change anything. It is wrong-headed. It is foolish. There are benefits here for citizens in getting government right.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Briefly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to pursue for a moment the comments made by the member for Winnipeg South in which he expressed dismay that too many Canadians do not think of their government as being their friend, as being on their side. I could not agree more with the member that this is a lamentable fact.

But would the member not agree that in part this results from a sad record of the current Liberal government far too often acting not in the public interest but very much to advance private interests, which is not at all the purpose of having a government in place?

I want to commend the member for his candour in saying that he actually would not trust government currently with such an identity card. Therefore, I find it somewhat contradictory for him to say that we should nevertheless see this in the context of ensuring that governments are more accountable, and with certain restrictions, then, he in fact would be in favour of moving ahead on that basis. I wonder if I could ask the member to respond.

Mr. Reg Alcock: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. The response is huge, unfortunately, but I will try to respond a little bit.

I think we are on the verge of a big change in how we manage public space and how we manage government. I think that some of the problems that all governments face, including this one, derive from excessive secrecy and a lack of accountability; yes, it is a simple one. I think the Chamber serves a real purpose as a national values clarification place for the nation, where true values are debated and national consensus is arrived at, or could be, but this place has become increasingly irrelevant to how we govern ourselves. I think that is wrong.

The question is, how do we turn around something that is as large, complex and cumbersome as government? One of the tools is to re-frame the information environment, which means we have to be open to a number of things, including re-framing how we deliver

privacy protection. Otherwise, it becomes a tool for continued bad government.

We cannot just respond to this by saying "we dassn't do it". We need to open it up a little bit. Is protection of personal privacy important? Yes, exceptionally important. But is breaking down the culture of secrecy and giving us tools that allow us to really manage government important? I think it is, vitally important, and I do not think those two things are mutually exclusive.

• (1355)

The Deputy Speaker: The House knows that from time to time the Chair is reluctant, and I personally am reluctant, to ask someone to take the floor for a couple of minutes. With the co-operation of the House I will entertain another question for the hon. member for Winnipeg South. A supplementary from the hon. member for Halifax.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully and I know the member for Winnipeg South has had a real interest in the whole question of the use of technology, about how to balance the public interest and private considerations and so on. I welcome his full participation in this issue.

I would nevertheless like to raise the question with him of whether he is not somewhat concerned about the possibility that in the particular environment where security has become such an overwhelming concern of people, is there not the danger that government will, in that environment, seize the initiative on this question of a national identity card, so that before we know it, it is just in place? Then people are left saying that they do not like giving up their privacy and they do not really like the notion that we end up creating almost an apartheid situation at some point, that we could be called upon to give an accounting of ourselves when we are doing absolutely nothing that is anybody's business, because there is such a fear and insecurity in this society generally.

I want to add to that. It is perhaps not so much a question as a comment. I believe the member was chastising the New Democratic Party for its unwillingness to discuss this issue, but I would just have to state the obvious, that if we were unwilling to discuss the issue, we would not exactly have used our opposition day to bring forward the issue out into the open and under the spotlight in public view through Parliament, which is exactly what we are here for.

Mr. Reg Alcock: Mr. Speaker, again we have an interesting couple of questions. One of my statements along the way was that if the government said today it would introduce a national identity card, I would oppose it. I would absolutely oppose it, and I would vote for a motion like the one the New Democratic Party put forward, for exactly the reasons the member raises. I think that in this atmosphere of fear about terrorism and a demand for increased security there is exactly that problem. The problem is that we will willingly let go of a whole bunch of cherished liberties in order to get one potential good.

At the same time, what I worry about and what I am always listening for is this: Let us keep our minds open to the fact that the use of technology, the relationship of data within government data banks et cetera, may be a good thing if it is done under the right conditions. Part of those conditions for me would be—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Chair has been generous, and I appreciate the co-operation of members, but I must now proceed to Statements by Members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

FESTIVAL DU VOYAGEUR

Mr. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, beginning tomorrow, February 14, and until February 23, the Festival du Voyageur will take place in historic St. Boniface. It is western Canada's largest winter festival.

The festival welcomes over 150,000 visitors every year and generates economic spinoffs of over \$11 million in Manitoba.

The Festival du Voyageur, which has won major national and international awards, draws many performers from all regions of Canada. Through activities such as the Governor's Ball and the Festin du bourgeois, the festival pays tribute to the first Canadian pioneers in the west, who played a vital role in the fur trade, from Montreal to Louisiana.

During the Festival du Voyageur, Fort Gibraltar, the Rivière-Rouge Trading Post and Fort de la Reine will bring back to life the francophone, Metis and aboriginal traditions of the Red River colony in the 19th century.

The friendly Franco-Manitoban community is proud of its heritage and invites everyone to share its joie de vivre and warm up Manitoba's winter.

* * *

• (1400)

[English]

WINTERLUDE WINNERS

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the sixth edition of the Canada snow sculpture competition at the Ottawa Winterlude festival was held from February 3 to 9.

I am very proud to say that this year's Alberta team was represented by individuals from my riding of Red Deer. Dawn Detarando, Will Truchon and Brian McArthur, captain of the team, had 43 hours to sculpt their block of snow. It was judged on technical merit and artistic impression.

The Winterlude theme was the spirit of Canada. Dawn's, Will's and Brian's proposal, called "The Magic Canoe", certainly captured this theme. The sculpting of this unique canoe used by the voyageurs to represent Canada's fur trade history, and many other Canadian depictions, were all part of the presentation.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate team Alberta for being selected to participate in this celebrated event and applaud them for taking second place in the contest. I would like to thank them for sharing their artistic talents so that all Canadians could enjoy them.

S. O. 31

[Translation]

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Mr. Gérard Binet (Frontenac—Mégantic, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, suicide is a phenomenon that affects all age groups and social classes and, sometimes, it can strike very close to home.

February 9 to 15 is the 13th Quebec suicide prevention week. The main objective of this event is to convince young people that suicide is neither a solution nor an option.

Quebec has the highest suicide rate in Canada. Suicide is currently the number one cause of death among teenagers, closely followed by accidents.

We must recognize the efforts being made by professionals to prevent these tragedies. To this end, I want to stress the excellent work done by l'Ensoleillée, a mental health community resource centre in Lac-Mégantic, and particularly Dany Couture, for his involvement. Mr. Couture is urging the public to stress the importance of being personally involved in the prevention of suicide. Care and treatment can save lives. Suicide prevention is everyone's business.

* * *

FRANÇOIS JOSEPH

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 10th anniversary of the Industry Canada Computers for Schools Program.

Recently, a gentleman in my riding was honoured for his involvement in this program.

François Joseph of the Computers For Schools Technology Centre in Hull received a Top Volunteer of the Year Award, for his energetic and enthusiastic contributions over the past two years or more.

He has repaired some 225 computers and has also been a great help to students.

This program facilitates access by young Canadians to computer technology in a school setting.

Congratulations to Mr. Joseph. Without him, the program would never have expanded as rapidly as it has.

* * *

[English]

CURLING

Mr. John O'Reilly (Haliburton—Victoria—Brock, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the recent provincial curling championship, the Nokia Cup, held in Mississauga at the Hershey Centre, a demonstration game was held by two special Olympic teams.

I wish to congratulate both teams, but in particular the team from Lindsay, Ontario, skipped by Tim Keenan. His rink consisted of vice Dale Morgan, second Rob Bowins and lead Jason Kilgannon.

Coaches Finni Verbik, Elizabeth Crum, Susan Banks and Lorraine Mullen can be proud of their work with the team known as the Hard Rockers.

S. O. 31

SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in March 2001 the government voted in favour of establishing a sex offender registry. Parliament ordered the government to complete it by January 2002. Two years later it finally introduced a bill that does not address the problem.

First, the legislation is not retroactive. Sex offenders have a recidivism rate of 40% but still not a single sex offender currently doing time will be part of that date base, and it is in the thousands. Worse, once an offender is convicted, an application still has to be made at the time of sentencing to even put his name on the list. Even then, an offender can apply to have his name kept off the list if it would cause them “greater harm than public good”.

The last thing we need to do is clog up our already overworked courts with appeals by rapists to respect their privacy. Bill C-23 is a perfect example of how Liberals make policy. It is weak-kneed, it has no direction, and it relies on the courts to make the hard decisions instead of Parliament. They should be ashamed of this bill.

* * *

• (1405)

LABRADOR WINTER GAMES

Mr. Lawrence O'Brien (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from March 9 to 15, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador will host the eighth Labrador Winter Games, held every three years. This is the 20th anniversary of the first games, which were held in 1983.

The winter games are an important institution in Labrador. Athletes come together for friendly competition from every town and village. The games feature indoor and outdoor winter sports, including many competitions with a unique northern and Labrador flavour. There is also a strong cultural element, with entertainers from every region and culture making up the Big Land.

Congratulations go out to the organizers, volunteers, athletes and other participants in the 2003 Labrador Winter Games. I invite everyone across Labrador and Canada to take part in this unique celebration of Labrador community spirit.

* * *

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Julian Reed (Halton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with his first budget just days away, I would like to take this opportunity to remind the Minister of Finance and the House of the tremendous potential of biofuels.

Investing in biofuels like ethanol and biodiesel could mean new jobs, improved energy security, rural development, improved health for our constituents and decreased emissions of greenhouse gases. With new technology and falling costs, we must act now to reap the benefits.

We have taken first steps but we can and must do more. Rural caucus members from this side of the House have called for a \$400 million investment in a national renewable fuels strategy to provide incentives so that we can produce enough biofuel right here in Canada. I look forward to hearing good news in the budget.

[*Translation*]

ICE GOLF

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there will be a special event going on in my riding of Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis from February 21 to 23 this year. A golf tournament will be held on the ice of the St. Lawrence River. The first edition, planned for 2002, could not take place because of insufficient ice cover, but this year there is plenty, and then some.

There will be a nine-hole course on the ice at Rimouski, opposite Île Saint-Barnabé. The distance between holes will be 30% less than standard, to reflect the winter temperatures and the surface played on. Since the greens will be white, the game will have to be played with coloured balls.

This original idea will attract about one hundred golfers from the Lower St. Lawrence, Gaspé and Quebec City, offering them the opportunity to demonstrate their skills on an icy surface while getting plenty of fresh air.

I wish to draw attention to this local event and to congratulate the organizers for this opportunity to have a different kind of fun during our Quebec winter.

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[*English*]

MEMBER FOR LASALLE—ÉMARD

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, there has been a sighting. The constituents of LaSalle—Émard had their MP surface in the House of Commons just the other day. He walks, he talks, he votes, but not very often. It is a big old country out there and it keeps a guy busy criss-crossing it, don't you know. He hardly has the time to take a stand, for goodness' sake. In fact, we would like to know where he really does stand.

On the gun registry: set your sights on this, Mr. Speaker. He okayed the cash for that billion dollar boondoggle.

On the health care crisis: he said “I will fix it”. No, wait a minute. He signed all the orders to choke the funding so badly, it is on life support.

On democracy: oh yes, he is the great defender. No, wait a minute, that is, he is the great pretender.

On Iraq: Silence is golden.

On defence: he said “I will raise money for defence”. Oops, I am sure it was he who was the one that drove a tank right through their budget. Well, tanks for nothing.

But in the spirit of the season, let me say to him:

Roses are red,
Violets are blue.
We need a new Prime Minister,
But it sure ain't you.

S. O. 31

[Translation]

CANADIAN FLAG

Ms. Yolande Thibeault (Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every year, there are celebrations to commemorate the first time the red and white maple leaf flag was raised, on February 15, 1965.

This day, long awaited by the proponents of a distinctive flag, marked the official adoption of Canada's emblem. The red maple leaf then became the symbol by which Canada was recognized around the world.

The following words, spoken by the Hon. Maurice Bourget, Speaker of the Senate, on February 15, 1965, add further symbolic meaning to our flag:

The flag is the symbol of the nation's unity, for it, beyond any doubt, represents all the citizens of Canada without distinction of race, language, belief or opinion.

So, let us be proud of our Canadian flag.

* * *

● (1410)

FEDERAL ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the boundaries commission for the province of New Brunswick submitted its report to the House.

It is sad to note that the concerns of the stakeholders and people of my riding were not taken into consideration.

In fact, upon the appointment of this commission's officers, I objected to how it was done. Three individuals from the southern part of the province, all great Liberal Party supporters, ended up sitting on this commission.

Also, I would like to point out that these officers had been nominated by the Minister of Labour and minister responsible for New Brunswick. As I always said, there has been and still is a conflict of interest within this commission.

The result of the undemocratic process that took place is the following: francophone parishes will be deported, so to speak, to a community with a large anglophone majority. This is the deportation all over again, another slap in the face for the francophones of New Brunswick.

* * *

IRAQ

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in an article in *Le Nouvelliste*, published in Trois-Rivières on February 11, it was reported that opponents to the war in Iraq had a new ally, namely Shawinigan, the Prime Minister's home town.

In fact, the municipal council of Shawinigan passed a resolution stating that the town:

opposed Canada's participation in any military action against Iraq without the backing of a UN Security Council resolution and Canadian law.

Knowing that several municipalities in Quebec, Canada and the United States have already passed resolutions opposing any declaration of war without UN approval, we can only hope that the Prime Minister will finally get with the program, knowing that

his own constituents in Shawinigan have joined their voices to those of millions around the world.

The Prime Minister must know that this war can be avoided and that he has a role to play in opposing any unsanctioned military action.

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[English]

CHURCHILL HEIGHTS PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the grade 8 students from Churchill Heights Public School to Ottawa today. The students have travelled to Ottawa from my riding of Scarborough Centre to visit the Parliament Buildings and to better understand how their government functions. I will have the opportunity also to meet with them later this afternoon.

It is very important that all students take the opportunity to visit Parliament to experience firsthand how the legislative process works. As such, I encourage all my constituents to do as the students of Churchill Heights and visit Ottawa in the near future.

Again, I welcome Churchill Heights students and staff and I thank them for visiting us today. I am sure that they will leave Parliament inspired and proud to be Canadians.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, for several months now I have been asking questions about Canadian veterans who were exposed to mustard gas testing during World War II. The U.S. has just announced that it will compensate its veterans who were involved in these experiments.

Last week the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence stated that he was looking at the American initiative.

While I am pleased to see that our government is finally acting, why must we wait to study the American decision? Did the parliamentary secretary's response indicate that had the Americans not taken this decision the Canadian government would have done nothing? Are we not old enough to stand on our own two feet, admit our mistakes and correct them without guidance from the U.S.? Why not make our own decisions and let the Americans study ours?

After 58 years of frustration, is it not time to compensate these veterans who gave so much for this country during the dark days of World War II? Providing these veterans with compensation is the least we can do, considering what they did for Canada.

* * *

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of the House the urgent need for our public transit providers to ensure that its door to door transportation service for persons with mobility problems improve the service they currently deliver.

Oral Questions

Recently in my riding of Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale, Peel Region councillors have expressed serious concern for the Peel Transhelp service provided by Brampton Transit which has left many of these riders unable to get to important appointments even when the rides are booked days in advance. The annual number of disabled who rely on this service in Peel has increased from 3,700 passengers to 7,224 since 1998.

I would like to encourage all levels of government to work with local transit authorities to collectively find ways to improve this vital service on which many Canadians have come to rely.

* * *

• (1415)

CANADIAN FLAG

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in the 1970s there was a British comedy called *Don't Raise the Bridge, Lower the River*. Now we have a Canadian farce produced by public works called, "Don't Raise the Flag, Lower the Standards".

A couple of years ago Canadians were bothered by the great flag giveaway of the prime minister wannabe of Canadian Heritage. Not only was it outrageously expensive, but Canadians who sold flags had their market undercut. Canadians who proudly bought their own flag had their patriotism undercut. Nothing drains the value out of a symbol faster than handing it out for nothing.

Of course value has always been a concept beyond the grasp of that other side. In its misguided haste public works lowered the standards for our Canadian flag and made sure that voters would be disappointed after they received their flag.

Maybe Canadians should take a page from the former finance minister's playbook and fly the Panamanian flag. It appears to have served the member from LaSalle—Émard well in hiding his taxes from his insatiable cabinet colleagues.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

IRAQ

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, again today the Iraqi crisis has deepened. Arms inspectors now apparently believe that Iraqi violations of UN resolutions go far beyond what was previously suspected.

Allied troops are amassing in the Persian Gulf and President Bush gave an address to his troops today that clearly put them on a war alert for Iraq.

In response, our defence minister announces sending troops to Afghanistan.

Does the government get it? Is it engaged in the Iraq crisis and, if so, how?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course we are engaged in the Iraq crisis and are engaged in it in a way that the Canadian population wants us to be engaged,

in a way that ensures the best possible way of getting peace and working through our multilateral institutions in support of our American allies, telling the Americans and working with them as we take this through the United Nations process, which is the best guarantee of security for them, security of the world and security for Canadians.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I think what the minister is really saying is that they are reading polls and doing focus groups.

A worldwide terrorist alert is also escalating. Tanks are positioned at Heathrow airport in London. The United States of America is on a nationwide orange alert. We are told that prominent North Americans may face assassination. In response, the government tells us that it is finally banning groups that have long been illegal elsewhere.

Does the government get it on this? Is it putting Canada on some kind of security alert and, if so, at what level?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is very concerned about what is happening in the United Kingdom and the United States. We are in touch with other governments and there is a sharing of intelligence. We have no information. The opposition should listen to this because we are concerned about what Canadians hear, and Canadians need to hear the truth.

We have no information that there will be a security attack against Canada, but we are taking every precaution necessary.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I guess our fear is that this government would be the last to find out.

As this crisis worsens, there is anxiety in financial markets worldwide. Here in North America we are already seeing delays at the border.

Only now, after months of disengagement, our Prime Minister travels today to the United States. Given that Canada and the government has not been part of the allied coalition, what assurance can the government give the House that war or security activities will, in no way, affect or disrupt Canadian trade, or lose Canadians their jobs?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the hon. member would have the temerity to ask that question. This is a very grave situation.

The fact is that Canadians need to be reassured. We do not need the opposition fearmongering. We are all concerned and the Prime Minister will outline Canada's concerns when he speaks this evening in Chicago.

Canadians have to know that we have done a lot since September 11, 2001, to increase security in the country and we will continue to do more.

*Oral Questions***TERRORISM**

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, as the threat of war increases so does the threat of terrorist reprisal. While the rest of the world is taking action against known terrorist organizations, Canada is lagging seriously behind.

To date, we have only listed 19 terrorist entities, while the United Nations has a list of close to 200.

The southeast Asian terrorist group, Jemaah Islamiah, was responsible for the Bali bombing that killed over 200 people, including two Canadians, yet this well-known terrorist organization is not on the Canadian list. Why?

• (1420)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we do things differently in this country. In fact, we do it more carefully and more securely in my point of view.

We have a process with restrictions that were placed on it by the House. There are severe restrictions when we name entities on the anti-terrorist list under Bill C-36. We are continuing to work on that list. We named three more entities yesterday. Regardless of whether or not they are on the list, our security intelligence services, our law enforcement services—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Crowfoot.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, Canadian Alliance): That is right, Mr. Speaker, we do things much differently. As the world reacts quickly, we react slowly. And shame on the Solicitor General.

The revolutionary armed forces of Colombia are referred to as the most dangerous terrorist organization in the western hemisphere. Moro Islamic liberation front threatened the Canadian embassy last year, killed 13 people abroad in a Canadian mining truck in December 2002, and reportedly has been trying to extort money from a Canadian mining firm.

Neither of these terrorist organizations are on the Canadian list. Why not?

Hon. Wayne Easter (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will tell the House how the official opposition operates. It operates on the basis of creating fear from that side of the House. We will not accept that on this side of the House.

We are doing our job in terms of listing entities. We are doing our job in terms of the security intelligence service of the country. We are doing our job in terms of working with other international services around the world to combat terrorism without trying to create headlines.

* * *

[Translation]

IRAQ

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the eve of the inspectors presenting their report, the U.S. Secretary of State has given the Security Council an ultimatum. Colin Powell said, and I quote, “—if the UN will not act (and demonstrates its irrelevance, then the United States is prepared, with a coalition of the willing, to act”.

With the Prime Minister scheduled to speak in Chicago today, will the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell us here, in the House, that under no circumstances will Canada be part of a coalition of the willing without the support of the UN?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the message the Prime Minister will be giving in Chicago tonight is the same as the one he has been giving here in the House all along. He favours acting through the United Nations Security Council. That has always been our approach.

We have resolution 1441. We have established a process. Mr. Blix has established that this process is serious and credible. We are committed to this process and we will remain committed.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if that is the case then, if Canada has decided against participating, under any circumstances, in a coalition of willing countries that does not have the Security Council's support, has the Minister of Foreign Affairs told Colin Powell that under no circumstances will we be a part of such a coalition, the one Colin Powell is referring to? Because he said clearly that if the UN would not act, they would, with allies and countries willing to join them. Did the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell him not to count on us? That would be clear.

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the fact that when I was in Washington, not long ago, with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, I told him that we are a sovereign country, that we make our own decisions based on our interests, on the interests of Canadians and especially on the interest of safeguarding peace around the world.

In this context, I clearly explained that Canada believes that the United States would be better served by acting within the United Nations, for their own security and for the security of the whole world.

• (1425)

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Mexico is a very close trading partner of the United States and, like Canada, it borders the U.S. However, this has not prevented President Fox from clearly saying no yesterday to unilateralism and war, and yes to peace, disarming Iraq and strengthening the United Nations.

Will the Prime Minister, who says he supports the peace process, but is moving toward war, not show as much courage as President Fox and remove the shadow of ambiguity from Canada's position?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this House and the entire world have followed what Canada has done since the Prime Minister told President Bush, a long time ago, that Canada believes that the best course of action, and the only way to ensure the survival of important international institutions and promote world peace, is to work within the United Nations.

This is what we are doing and what we have always done, and we are proud of this approach. It is a successful one right now. Let us stick to this course, which is the best one for everyone.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we heard the Prime Minister say in the House that resolution 1441 was sufficient. There will be an important meeting of the Security Council tomorrow. Tonight, the Prime Minister will be speaking in Chicago.

Oral Questions

Is it not time for him to follow the Mexican president's example and clearly tell the entire world what Canada's position is? Is resolution 1441 reason enough to throw our lot in with the United States or will it take a second resolution from the Security Council? When will he stop being a yes-man?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tonight, our Prime Minister will be speaking in Chicago. He is going to tell our close American ally what the Canadian position and approach are.

We do not need to copy the Mexicans, as the Bloc would have us do; we do not need to copy the French, as the Bloc would have us do; we do not need to copy the Germans, as the Bloc would have us do. We are Canadians and we want to adopt a Canadian policy.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has been doing so much skating on Iraq lately that I thought I would change the subject and ask it about hockey.

I wonder if the government could tell us whether it approves of the use of \$60 million worth of taxpayer money that appears to be going into the savings of the Senators hockey club.

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the confidentiality of taxpayers does not permit me or CCRA to confirm or deny whether or not there has been a specific request for an opinion. Any taxpayer or corporation can request an opinion, but it is a Criminal Code offence in this country to release taxpayer information.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I did not ask for confidential information, unless the minister's view of whether taxpayers should pay to bail out a hockey club is somehow confidential. I am asking the minister whether or not the government approves of taxpayer money being used in this way.

In the budget, instead of having a national capital hockey strategy, will we have something that people really need, like a national housing strategy, for a change?

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, now that the member opposite has clarified that he in fact is not interested in any particular ruling from CCRA, I want to inform him that the budget will come down next Tuesday, February 18, at 4 p.m.

* * *

TERRORISM

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, in June 2001, three months before the al-Qaeda attacks, CSIS warned the government, "Canadians, now more than ever, are potential victims and Canada a potential venue for terrorist attacks". The government did nothing about that warning.

Now it is reported that CSIS has intelligence that al-Qaeda may be preparing strikes in North America, including Canada.

Are those reports wrong? Does CSIS say that there is no threat to Canada equivalent to the threat that has mobilized Britain and the United States?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I answered that question earlier. We have no discernable information that Canada is the focus of such an attack. I think we all should try to cool the rhetoric because the situation is very dire, not just in the United States but in Europe and the Middle East. We have to reassure Canadians that we are doing all we can in terms of security to protect them and their best interests.

● (1430)

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, that is an astounding statement in light of the fact that, on the basis of its intelligence, the United Kingdom has dispatched tanks to Heathrow airport. The United States has anti-aircraft weapons on the streets of Washington. As long ago as June 1998, the director of Canada's intelligence service warned:

With perhaps the singular exception of the United States, there are more international terrorist organizations active [in Canada] than any other country of the world.

What leads the government to believe that the threats, which are considered to be deadly serious in Britain and the United States, require no special measures to protect Canadians?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am shocked that a former prime minister would come forward with this alarmist rhetoric at this time.

I have answered the question. We have no discernable information that there is a pending security threat in Canada. That does not stop us from taking all the necessary precautions. We have increased security since September 11, 2001, and we will continue to be vigilant.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week the Minister of Justice spoke of "cash management" in reference to funding the firearms registry. Yet, on December 5 this Parliament unanimously withdrew the funding to the Canadian Firearms Centre.

Why has the Minister of Justice continued to fund his gun registry in spite of the expressed will of the House to discontinue funding?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if my memory serves me right, this issue is the subject of a question of privilege which Mr. Speaker will rule on. I would rely far more on the objective answer of your honour than the rhetoric I am hearing from across the way.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like an answer to my question. They are avoiding it, definitely.

Members on that side of the House are in agreement with the Canadian Alliance that the government has wasted \$1 billion on the firearms registry. This House spoke with one voice in restricting any further spending, yet the minister continues to fund the program from unnamed sources.

Oral Questions

Why does the minister believe that he can override a vote of this Parliament?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, we are not talking about \$1 billion and the member knows it very well.

Second, let us talk about the benefit of the program. Some 1.9 million owners have been licensed. Six million guns have been registered. Police use the registry 2,000 times per day. Some 9,000 licences have been revoked or refused.

We are talking about a good program. We are talking about Canadian values. We are talking about public safety. We are heading in the right direction and we will proceed with the program.

* * *

[*Translation*]

IRAQ

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have learned that U.S. soldiers are apparently already in Iraqi territory, involved among other things in building landing strips that could be used in a military conflict against Iraq.

Can the Minister of Defence tell us whether Canada is taking part in any illegal activity of this type?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only are our troops not in Iraq right now, but there have been no decisions made as to whether they will be if there is a war.

As we have said a number of times, close to a thousand it seems, this is a hypothetical question. We are with the UN. The government will make the necessary decision later.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question that is not hypothetical. We know that there are Canadian officers in Qatar at this time, and that they are helping American officers plan a potential war on Iraq in what is termed a joint command.

How can Canada be involved in a joint command in Qatar and yet not now be complicit in the illegal building of landing strips in Iraq?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for some months we have had military representatives in Florida obtaining information from the Americans. Those same officers are now in Qatar for the same purpose.

The government has made no decision. We hope there will not be a war. If there is one, however, the government will reach a decision at the appropriate time.

* * *

•(1435)

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the former Minister of Finance built up a \$45 billion EI surplus on the backs of Canadian workers and firms. What many Canadians do not know is the EI surplus does not exist in practice. Instead of it building up over the years, the Liberals have spent all that extra EI money. It is long gone.

I ask the current Minister of Finance to stop this cash grab. Will he stop overcharging Canadian workers and firms?

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, this is the government that for nine consecutive years has reduced EI premiums.

I realize the member on the other side sometimes does not pay attention but the reality is that the government has been reducing it, continues to do that and is committed. I hope the member will pay attention as we move forward after the next budget.

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, according to the Auditor General, a \$15 billion surplus would be more than enough to deal with an economic downturn but for years the former Minister of Finance has been fleecing Canadian workers of billions of dollars in order to add to his bottom line.

Would the current Minister of Finance finally leave the legacy of Enron style bookkeeping behind, correct this practice and stop overcharging on EI?

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not familiar with the Alliance Party's new math, but the reality is when we reduce it every year, that means it goes down. Therefore, that is a major saving, over \$860 million last year alone, to employers and employees.

I would suggest that is what Canadians are looking for and that is what this government is committed to do.

* * *

[*Translation*]

IRAQ

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Foreign Affairs said it would surprise him greatly if Donald Rumsfeld had said that the United States had considered using chemical weapons in Iraq. Yet, the defense secretary testified before a committee of the House of Representatives that there are times when the use of non-lethal agents for riot control purposes is totally appropriate, although an international convention states the opposite.

Will the minister continue to contend that the defense secretary's remarks are a figment of our imagination?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the U.S. Secretary of Defense explored before a congressional committee the possibility of using non-lethal riot-control agents. He also clearly indicated that he would examine this possibility in the context of international law. I am convinced that our ally, which promotes international law around the world, will always live up to its international obligations.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister must go much further. The U.S. Secretary of Defense also stated that a presidential waiver could be used to circumvent the treaty banning the use of chemical weapons.

Oral Questions

Now that the minister knows what the U.S. Secretary of Defense said, will Canada, which is a signatory to this treaty, be willing to denounce the remarks made by Donald Rumsfeld?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are two things. It should be clearly pointed out that, contrary to what the hon. member opposite indicated, the U.S. Secretary of Defense did not talk about using chemical weapons. He talked about non-lethal riot-control agents, which is very important and very different.

Canada has always encouraged the United States and any signatory to the convention to comply with their obligations under the convention.

* * *

[English]

AIRLINE SECURITY

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Air Canada and WestJet have reported less passenger traffic in January 2003 than in January 2002. This confirms what analysts have feared, which is that taxes more than terrorism are contributing to fewer people flying in this country.

The \$24 air tax is the largest tax increase in the final budget of the former finance minister. Will the current finance minister concede that the air tax implemented by his predecessor was a big mistake and will he agree to scrap it next Tuesday, yes or no?

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member across the way knows, on November 8 the minister announced that he would have a review of the air security charge. Over 300 submissions were sent in. I would tell the member that currently that is under review.

As the member knows, February 18 is budget day, as was mentioned earlier. I hope the member will stand and applaud the government for the type of budget we will bring forward.

• (1440)

[Translation]

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, there is no way will I ever applaud such a tax.

Air Canada and WestJet have informed us that there has been a drop in passenger load factors between January 2002 and January 2003. Clearly, it is not terrorists who are discouraging Canadians from travelling, but the \$24 tax.

My question is clear: is the Minister of Finance prepared, yes or no, to eliminate the \$24 security tax, which was his predecessor's mistake? Is he going to cut the tax, yes or no?

[English]

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again I would like to emphasize for the member that there was a review process. Over 300 submissions were made, including from WestJet and Air Canada.

If the member listened carefully, although it seems he is not interested in the answer but is only interested in asking the question,

the reality is that it is under review. The budget is on February 18. We are taking this issue very seriously. Stay tuned.

* * *

SMART REGULATION STRATEGY

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

I would like to follow up on a commitment that was made in the Speech from the Throne. What progress has been made in establishing an external advisory committee on smart regulation?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am quite pleased to inform the House of yet another Speech from the Throne commitment that has been delivered by the right hon. Prime Minister.

As a matter of fact, the Prime Minister in his wisdom has recently announced the appointment of Mr. Hugh MacDiarmid as chair of the External Advisory Committee on Smart Regulation.

The government is committed to modernizing the regulatory process to make Canadian business and the Canadian sector otherwise work even better than it is at the present time.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister had no difficulty getting in touch with a bank president to try to save the Ottawa Senators.

Now the minister has decided to let the Senators help themselves by giving the team a \$60 million tax cut. Regrettably, this money is going to be taken out of the surplus in the employment insurance fund. It is unacceptable that millionaire hockey players are receiving this money.

The employment insurance fund has a surplus of \$43 billion. Will the Finance Minister pick up the phone, call the Minister of Human Resources Development, and get the eligibility criteria for the employment insurance program modified?

[English]

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the member opposite has asked for information and it would be a Criminal Code offence if I answered. I know, Mr. Speaker, you would not want to see me off to jail if I answered the question, so I will not.

I do want to assure the member opposite and all members in the House that there never has been, there is not now, and there never will be political interference in the decisions that CCRA makes. They are done by professionals and there is always an opportunity for the courts to review those decisions.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Natural Resources.

I understand that next week the Minister of Finance will be looking for money to build his budget. I can give the House some indication as to where he could find \$3.2 billion. He just has to take the tax incentives away from the fossil fuel and nuclear industries.

Will the government announce that it will do that next week and begin by replacing it with a package that provides remuneration for energy efficiency and conservation and tax incentives for the renewable energy industry?

Hon. Herb Dhaliwal (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are doing a lot of those things already in terms of promoting renewable energy.

The hon. member should congratulate the government for spending \$260 million to promote wind energy and to make sure that we look at all sorts of renewable energy. Our climate change fund of \$1.6 billion is exactly the type of thing the member is talking about.

I thank the member for his support. We will continue to work on this to make sure that we tap all the renewable energy and make sure we do things to protect our climate.

* * *

• (1445)

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Transport recently posted an ad on the government website for intelligence analysts. There are now about a dozen departments and agencies adding intelligence officers to their lists, including Revenue Canada, immigration, foreign affairs, industry, environment, justice, transport, Privy Council, Parks Canada, defence, RCMP and CSIS.

Who is in charge of this security hodgepodge and how often do they meet to compare notes?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would have hoped that the hon. member would have congratulated the government for heightening the intelligence efforts of all of the departments.

Since September 11 the Deputy Prime Minister has chaired a committee of cabinet that has dealt with security matters. Each department has intelligence requirements and that is reflected in the hiring practices.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, speaking of intelligence, the Department of Transport ad for intelligence officers indicated a number of permanent positions. The job requires a knowledge of intermodal transportation which mainly includes containers and container ships in ports.

The strange thing is that people who live in any port in Canada cannot apply for the job. A person who lives or works in Vancouver cannot apply for the job. People who live in Toronto, Montreal, Halifax or Saint John cannot apply for the job. Only those people living in the great port of Ottawa can apply for the job.

Oral Questions

Does the minister think the only intelligence is in Ottawa? What is wrong with giving people in Vancouver, Toronto or Halifax an opportunity?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians are equal. No matter where they come from in the country, they will be considered for any position.

* * *

GASOLINE PRICES

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the price of fuel is an essential part of the budget for many Canadian families, especially those in rural and suburban areas. Today's prices threaten their ability to heat their homes and take their children to family activities.

Why is the government taking excessive fuel taxes from struggling overtaxed Canadian families?

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we know, fuel taxes go into general revenue. If there are concerns about the price of gasoline, that is a provincial responsibility. In 1975 the Bill Davis government, instead of raising it 5¢ a gallon immediately, put in a 90 day cap. Therefore, constitutionally, this lies with the provinces. If the member is concerned, she should phone her premier.

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is strange that the GST is federal.

Canadian families are paying more taxes than ever before. Home heating and transportation costs are hitting record levels. Gas and fuel taxes are too high for Canadian families.

When will the government reduce fuel taxes so Canadians can run their businesses and keep their families warm?

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government needs no lectures from the other side on tax reduction. The government has continued to reduce both personal taxes, corporate taxes, and again I would point out the large portion of provincial sales taxes. If members want to see a freeze in the price they need to talk to their premiers.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have seen an intolerable increase in the price of gas and heating oil.

We know that the provinces are responsible for retail prices and the federal government is responsible for competition. The public expects each to do their job.

Oral Questions

Will the Minister of Industry assume his responsibilities, like his Liberal colleague who joins us in denouncing the odour of collusion in the oil industry, and will he conduct an investigation instead of just grandstanding in the House?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Competition Bureau monitors the activities of the companies in this matter continuously.

I cannot agree to the Bloc's proposal to interfere in an exclusively provincial jurisdiction. The Constitution of Canada makes it clear that only the provinces can regulate the retail price of gas.

I cannot agree to the Bloc's proposal. The provinces must be allowed to exercise their powers.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if the minister were on top of this issue, he would know that it is not at the retail stage, but at the refinery level that competition is breaking down.

All the profits are made by a small group of oil companies that agree on the same profit margin at the same time.

Will the minister admit that the ball is in his court?

• (1450)

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Competition Bureau closely reviewed all these circumstances in the past. We continue to monitor the situation.

Nonetheless, regulating retail gas prices comes under provincial jurisdiction. I refuse to centralize all the powers in Ottawa. That would be unacceptable. The provinces have their own role in the federation. This is a provincial responsibility.

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[English]

TRADE

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, heightened security and the soon to be imposed 24 hour notification requirement threaten to shatter businesses and industry and in particular our auto industry.

Yesterday, the Government of Ontario warned that U.S. based parent firms will start moving their existing Ontario auto plants to the United States and stop building new plants here in Canada unless goods continue to flow freely across the border.

Has the government received an exemption from this 24 hour notice? Yes or no.

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows there have been a number of proposals and discussions that have not yet been determined finally.

What has been determined is that the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Canada stood together and said they were not going to allow terrorists to win by shutting down our economies. It is the their goal and ours to work together to have the smartest border possible so that the economies of both of our countries can continue to prosper.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I must conclude from that non-answer that it is a no.

The government might as well post a closed for business sign on the 49th parallel. In Ontario alone up to one million jobs depend on cross-border trade. The U.S. government has made it clear that pre-notification is coming. The government must convince our major trading partner that Canada is not a security risk.

What is the government doing to ensure that a system of pre-notification will be up and running before security threats shut down our border, harm our industries, and our jobs here in Canada?

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): I will tell you what I am not going to do, Mr. Speaker. I am not going to take any lectures from the member opposite.

In fact, since September 11, 2001, we all know that the world has changed and we have been working very hard on this side of the House to ensure that the border is a priority, and that it functions in a smart and effective way. There are some people who are busy reading the clips trying to send out information that we are not doing that.

However, together with our American partners we are determined, even through this difficult time and while there may be some temporary delays, to keep that border functioning as best as it can.

* * *

[Translation]

JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

Ms. Hélène Scherrer (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 20, Canada will celebrate the Journée internationale de la Francophonie.

Can the Secretary of State responsible for the Francophonie tell us what special plans he has in store for us on this special day?

Hon. Denis Paradis (Secretary of State (Latin America and Africa) (Francophonie), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, Canada will be hosting His Excellency Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former Secretary General of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie and former Secretary General of the United Nations, who is coming to help us celebrate the Journée internationale de la Francophonie on March 20.

I invite all the hon. members to join us in celebrating this special day. I would add that Canada will be honouring one of the most eminent diplomats of our times and celebrating its sustained efforts to promote Canadian principles and values: the promotion of peace, democracy and human rights.

Oral Questions

[English]

AIR INDIA

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Inderjit Singh Reyat pleaded guilty this week to his role in the 1985 Air India bombing, Canada's worst mass murder. It is an insult to the families of the 329 victims that he killed that he was sentenced to just five years.

Now we learn he is due to be transferred to the minimum security Ferndale Institution in my riding, also known as "Club Fed". Not only will he be doing soft time for this heinous crime, but he will be eligible for parole in 10 months.

How can the Minister of Justice possibly defend a system that could see this mass murderer back on the streets by next year?

Hon. Wayne Easter (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are two points that the member is absolutely incorrect on.

He talks about a "Club Fed"; there is no such thing as a "Club Fed" in the system. I know members opposite like to believe in fairy stories, but that is in fact true.

The fact of the matter is that eligibility for parole does not mean release on parole. It is a date at which the Parole Board has a statutory requirement to hear the case. The decision will be made by the Parole Board.

* * *

● (1455)

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we do not believe in fairy tales or the Easter bunny.

Earlier in question period the Minister of Justice was up bragging about his unfinished, error prone, and billion dollar gun registry. How could he justify quietly funneling millions of dollars more into this system when his own colleagues say it is a contempt of this House?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this issue is before the Speaker for a ruling. We contend on our side of the House that nothing has been breached.

The hon. member now is contesting that something has been breached. That discussion took place yesterday. We will wait for the Speaker's ruling which we will respect. I only hope that he and his colleagues will as well.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Revenue has just stated in the House that she could not confirm or deny whether a tax rebate plan of up to \$60 million to save the Ottawa Senators hockey team was in the works.

Is the minister telling us that her government could hand \$60 million over to the Senators without anyone being the wiser? Is that what she is doing behind our backs while hiding behind the confidentiality of tax matters?

[English]

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada Customs and Revenue Agency has a very long record of integrity and confidentiality provisions when it comes to taxpayer information. Any information on rulings that have been requested by any taxpayer are confidential. I cannot even tell the House whether a ruling has been requested by any taxpayer.

What I can tell the member opposite, as I have previously said and I will say it again because it is extremely important, there is no political inference. As minister I do not interfere in these decisions. They are professional decisions and they apply the law.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. When can Canadians expect his department, when handling passports, to return to the 45 day guarantee?

We have had people inquiring about their passports being delayed 60 days. When can he expect to have his department back to normal in order to guarantee Canadians a 45 day return?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I tried to answer the question yesterday. I appreciate the member's concern and the concern of Canadians about the service we are trying to give them through the passport office.

As I told the House yesterday, increased security measures together with an unforeseen volume have given us problems. I have addressed this by bringing in more people to get the backlog worked out. I sent all members a statement from the department as to how we can get the backlog down. I expect and hope it will be down to at least a month within the next month, but it is very hard to deal with an issue that is overwhelming by its complexity and nature.

I apologize to members. We are working—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laurentides.

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[Translation]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the labour disputes at Cargill, Vidéotron and Radio-Nord are reducing hundreds of families to poverty, the federal government continues to support the use of scabs. But there is worse still. The Minister of Labour claims that employees do not want antiscab provisions included in the Canada Labour Code, which is totally false.

How can the Minister of Labour make such comments when, in a brief tabled on November 20, 1995, during the review of part I of the Canada Labour Code, the FTQ used four full pages to demonstrate that it is absolutely necessary to have antiscab provisions?

Supply

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the case of Cargill and Vidéotron, I am pleased to say that the two sides are now negotiating.

As for the issue of replacement workers, when part I of the Canada Labour Code was drafted, workers wanted one thing, while employers wanted another. Therefore, a compromise was reached. That compromise satisfies both sides, but it remains a compromise.

* * *

• (1500)
[English]

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in what could only be described as a political death wish, British Columbia's Liberal premier is raising gas taxes by 3.5¢. While the NDP is putting forward meaningful proposals to bring stability to fuel costs, the Alliance-Liberal cabal is assisting Canadians by raising taxes.

Canadians instinctively know they are being gouged by high fuel prices and the Minister of Industry said it is not within the federal jurisdiction. Under the Competition Act, a complaint to the tribunal should be referred to an energy commission with special expertise.

Would he agree that it should be—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Industry.

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the competition bureau has on many occasions in the past examined the activities in the energy sector and is alert to any evidence of collusion or improper conduct. That is one thing.

The other thing is controlling prices, which is something that is exclusively within the jurisdiction of the provinces. That is why I say there is a provincial jurisdiction here. Competition is federal; price control is provincial. Some provinces have already exercised that power. It is up to them to make that decision.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, the defence minister last week stated that changes would be made to SISIP, the flawed insurance program that covers our men and women of the armed forces. This is comforting news to those currently serving, but what about the veterans injured who will still receive no benefits for their injuries because this decision is not retroactive?

Will the defence minister advise the House today what plans are in place to compensate the veterans previously injured who received no benefit from SISIP? Those who lost both legs, both arms, their hearing and their eyes.

Will he tell us today what he plans to do?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful to Major Henwood who, through the media, brought to my attention when I assumed the portfolio as defence minister this issue of people who had lost their legs.

I have been working on this matter and was very pleased to announce the other day that as we move forward it will not be just

colonels and generals who will receive this benefit, but members of the Canadian Armed Forces of all ranks. This is a major advance and I am still working on the retroactivity section of this proposal.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker: Today being Thursday, I know the opposition House leader will want to ask a particular question.

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the government House leader if he could give the House an outline of the business for the rest of the day, tomorrow and next week.

Also, so we will all know, because all members would certainly want to be here to vote, could he advise us if on Monday there will be time allocation or closure used on Bill C-10A.

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will continue with the opposition day. On Friday we will consider Bill C-25, the public service reform bill.

Next Monday we will consider the bill that would reduce the cost of gun control, namely Bill C-10A, the amendments to the criminal code, because we want to reduce gun control costs. On Tuesday we will return to Bill C-24 respecting election finances until 4 p.m. when the Minister of Finance will present his no doubt excellent budget to the House.

The remainder of the week, that is Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of next week, I intend to call the budget debates.

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As I was a former car salesman, you can understand how important my credibility is to me. The Minister of Transport, in his answer to one of my questions, suggested that my statement was not credible. I would like to table a document to prove that all cities are not treated equally under his job advertisement.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1505)
[English]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—NATIONAL IDENTITY CARD

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it certainly is a pleasure to speak on this very interesting topic and the proposal brought forward by the New Democrats today.

Let me state right from the start that the minister's proposal for a national identity card is extremely ill-thought out. On procedural grounds alone it does not merit much discussion. The initial arguments appear particularly weak in terms of travel documents. The Canadian passport and the Nexus card provide very suitable identification.

If there are questions about the integrity of Canadian passports, then he should fix the passports rather than come up with yet another identity instrument. For example, the government may wish to consider a biometric identifier in the Canadian passport. The government has already committed to having such an identifier on the maple leaf card for landed immigrants.

Also, I must add that a government that cannot register five million guns has no business trying to register 30 million citizens. If the experience of the gun registry is anything to go by, the national identity card program would cost \$6 billion and still would not work.

My colleagues in their presentations have raised or will raise all these practical objections to a national identity card. During my time I want to discuss the broader security implications of the minister's proposal.

I submit that the proposal for a national identity card is in truth an admission by this government that it is too politically correct to take the necessary steps to pursue an aggressive defence against terrorism in Canada.

The events of September 11 have challenged Canadians and Americans to rethink their choices in the alleged trade-off between freedom and security; that is, to fight terrorism we should cede some privacy and legal protection to government security agencies to strengthen their effectiveness.

I ask, and my party asks, does the balance between security and freedom have to be a zero sum game? A zero sum game is one where an increase for one side must mean a corresponding decrease on the other, and vice versa. Does greater national security necessarily mean lesser individual freedom or do choices exist to enhance both? If we do have choices, what are they?

Seeking an answer takes us to the very definition of security and freedom and the relationship between them. Security does not mean that threats do not exist.

That some people will seek to harm others is universal and a constant facet of human nature. Security does exist to provide means to defend against attack. Those means may be physical such as a backyard fence or a wall between countries. They may be informational such as a burglar alarm or intelligence gathering.

In a broader sense, security is something bought whether by nations or individuals. I may hire a security guard; a nation raises an army. I may buy a mace can; a nation builds sophisticated weaponry. Security is always relative in scope and degree and varies according to the nature of the threat.

Supply

In any given country, some people will be more at risk than others. In the case of the recent terrorist threat, if one lives in a city, one is more likely to be harmed than if one lives in a forest. The nature of the adversary also modulates the degree of danger. Canada would face greater danger from a conflict with Iran than say Iceland.

I am restating the obvious because it is being submerged by the claim that terrorism has now made insecurity an absolute condition given the random nature of the attacks.

However how random is the threat of terrorism really? In the case of the September 11 attacks, while the acts themselves were random in the sense of the unexpected, the identity of the perpetrators surprised no one. They were angry men from three repressive, unstable countries.

While many means of terrorist attacks exist, in an airplane wielding a \$1.50 box cutter can lead to the same devastation as a truckload of dynamite. The actual pool of potential terrorists is relatively small and largely self-identified.

The public policy implication is as follows. Given the relative nature of insecurity, defending all people against all threats is not only impossible but also subject to very diminishing returns.

● (1510)

The last \$10 billion of anti-terrorist spending will likely not improve security as much as the first \$10 billion. The last \$10 billion may not only add little security, but may divert funds from areas that contribute as much to physical safety, like roads and public health. That would suggest we need some kind of cost benefit test for the expansion of the powers of security intelligence agencies as we should have for any regulatory regime. However, the inherent difficulties in drawing up the costs and benefits of regulating the environment of terror would exceed that of regulating water pollution or even crime generally.

While such an analysis is conceptually possible, it offends the notion that the government owes an equal standard of protection for all citizens. Still, the basic idea of setting priorities on anti-terrorism spending and activities to achieve greater cost effectiveness deserves our attention. One way to do that is to focus more on the who than on the how.

I cite the remarks of an Israeli expert when asked why Israeli security was more effective than America's. He stated, "The Americans are looking for a gun, Israelis are looking for a terrorist".

Focusing on potential terrorists rather than possible weapons raises the question of singling some people out for closer scrutiny than others. The argument is made that to do so represents discriminatory behaviour by the government and, therefore, an infringement on everyone's freedom.

Supply

The reason why that argument is false stems from the nature of the freedom and the state itself. As usual, Milton Friedman provides us with a succinct definition of freedom, "Political freedom means the absence of coercion of a man by his fellow men". The state, whether absolutely necessary or not, has the role of correcting coercion and preventing harm.

A democratic government under the rule of law should uphold freedom by restraining those who coerce and harm others by following a public test of necessity and applying force sufficient only to that goal.

By this definition, the government cannot treat everyone equally in all respects. Exceptions must be made to deal with known and potential agents of harm. The requirement, nonetheless, is that the exceptions should be justified, transparent and effective rather than punitive.

The principled and consistent exercise of state power to deal with the exception, individuals who threaten harm does not diminish the overall quality of freedom. A government does potentially impair freedom when it expands its surveillance and authority over all citizens simply to avoid being seen to single out any single identifiable group.

Again I cite Milton Friedman, "A society that puts equality...ahead of freedom will end up with neither equality nor freedom". He was speaking about economic equality, but the idea applies as well to how a government treats those who threaten life, limb and property.

Exceptions to the equal treatment of all citizens can be justified when dealing with potential terrorists. Ultimately extraordinary measures taken in defence of the country will and should be defended in a court of law. Mistakes and inconvenience may occur. The justification lies not only in the purpose of preventing terrorism, but also in the law's ability to make necessary corrections.

At a practical level, freedom and security can both advance if governments concentrated on the likeliest suspects using its existing powers rather than expanding its blanket powers. Canada already has many resources and the legislative authority to fight terrorism effectively. I wonder if it is using them efficiently. The degree to which the government needs more resources and legislation should be concentrated on fighting terrorism, not on expanding state scrutiny over all citizens for all reasons.

For this reason I and my party find no merit in pursuing further the government's proposal for a national identity card. I know from listening to colleagues on the other side and government ministers who do not agree with this that it probably will not go very far.

The reason I am speaking today is because our immigration critic is travelling with the immigration committee. She sent me some comments that I also want to put on the record because they are very good.

It occurred to my hon. colleague, the member for Calgary—Nose Hill, that a national identity card would do nothing to stop terrorists at our borders. It would only be another card that could be stolen and would prove to be more dangerous. It would be used as conclusive proof of identity.

Do not let the Liberals offer soothing reassurances about security of the card because we have seen how its security against GST fraud works and we saw how its security against HRDC boondoggles worked.

● (1515)

What greater example is there than that of the government telling us to bring in security cards, that they will be good for Canada, when it cannot even do a firearms registry correctly? Most of the people are not registered and those who are registered are registered improperly.

With a number of colleagues from both sides, I was at a dinner of the Canadian Restaurant Association last night. It was a very good dinner and a happy evening, as the association had just announced it had employed its millionth person in Canada working in the hospitality industry. It is one of the biggest industries in Canada, bigger than most others put together.

One of the executives of the association came up to me and told me his story. He said that as a law abiding citizen he registered his gun as soon as the registry came out. Then he was sent back a form telling him he had done something wrong, so he sent back another form. Then he said he received all the forms and his money. He was sent a cheque for the same amount he had sent in. He said he thinks that his gun is registered and he has enough documentation so that if they ever want to arrest him he will show them the receipt. He said he never did find out why they sent back the cheque but he cashed it and has his money back.

An hon. member: And he never got a licence.

Mr. John Reynolds: Whatever, it is a mess. It is just all over the place.

We can just imagine what would happen if tomorrow the government said everyone in the country was going to get a national identity card. The cost is enough to scare the heck out of everybody. Let us not listen to any soothing things the minister of immigration says about this issue.

Another thing to remember is that the Liberals hate the idea of a DNA database for criminals, yet they want a card for everybody. They hate the idea of a database for sex offenders, but they want a card for everybody. They hate the idea of identifying predators who prey on children. They hate the idea of putting biometrics on permanent residents' cards. Why then would they want a card for everybody?

Here is what the Liberals do love. They love making honest citizens carry identity cards if they own firearms. It is rather strange. Now they love the idea of making every living Canadian citizen carry a personal identity card. Strange. There is something very sinister about a party, the Liberal Party, that wants to track every single honest Canadian but makes no effort to control the criminal element.

We know there are people all across the country who oppose this. We have heard from the privacy commissioner. I will not go into detail, because I have heard it stated by other members in the House.

Supply

Our immigration critic, the member for Calgary—Nose Hill, is in the Maritimes today on an immigration tour. Hopefully she will come back with some great ideas for new legislation for immigration for the country. Heaven knows we need it. She has some comments from the information and privacy commissioner from Prince Edward Island. Her name is Karen Rose. She is opposed to the development of a national identification card, especially with biometrics.

Some of the concerns of the commissioner are as follows. A national identification card would be an unprecedented invasion of the privacy of Canadians, due to the establishment of a national database of personal information, and because it would require Canadians to identify ourselves on demand. Another concern is that there is no evidence that a national identification card would achieve the purposes it sets out to achieve, namely national security, immigration and identity theft controls. Her third point is that the very existence of such a card could open the floodgates to drastically increase police powers as well as the collection of personal information of every Canadian, and would change the nature of our free society.

That is what we really have to be concerned about: the free society. I have no objection to cards with my name and identification on them. I have a passport that I carry when I travel because it could be requested and I think that is a legitimate thing to be asked for at a border when one is going to a different country. I carry a driver's licence. It has a picture on it, so I have another piece of ID. I carry a House of Commons ID card, which is another picture ID. I have loads of other things such as credit cards, but I made the choice to get all of them, even my House of Commons identity card. Nobody twisted my arm and forced me to go into the room. I do not need that. I could get the little key for my office and go back and forth. Nobody insists I do that. If I do not want to drive a car I do not have to, so I do not need a driver's licence. They are my choices.

There are people in this country who want to have those freedoms. That is why some of them live in very small towns in the north, or in the forest. They only go to town once in a while and they hunt for a living. They like their freedom and they like our country because they can be free. However, if we are going to need a card, everyone in the world will know who we are and what we are. Some people just do not want that.

• (1520)

Also, there could be mistakes. How many times have we seen stories in the paper about someone who is arrested because they have the same name as someone else? I remember years ago when I went to the border and got asked questions about somebody. It turned out that there was a fellow with the same name who was a lawyer. They were wanting to talk to him for a reason and I got pulled into a room. They found out I was not that person, but just that name was enough. We can imagine the problems we might have with these ID cards.

Then there are the people in the counterfeiting business. I do not know how many phony passports there are across the world, but I know there are thousands of them. Hundreds of them are missing here. People steal the blanks, and they have done that, from the Canadian government because they are a very valuable tool. These cards would be forged and photographed, and fingerprints would be

done and changed. Somebody knows how to do that. It is a very dangerous thing and it certainly would affect our freedoms.

I am happy if things are made available to people and they can go get them themselves, but for the government to say everybody is going to register is wrong in a free and democratic country. Those of us who want to travel the world will get the documentation we need to do that. Those of us who do not want to should not have to do it.

We would be opposed. The minister has told members to go across the country and talk to their constituents. I have talked to my constituents. They are opposed. The minister should get the message from this debate today, from all sides of the House, that this is an issue that he should put to bed. He should forget about it and allow us to sleep better as we go to bed at night.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have to admit I am rather surprised that the NDP and the Alliance are both singing out of the same hymn book when it comes to a national identity card.

An hon. member: It won't last.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I know it probably will not last on all subjects, but I want to ask about a certain point. Many people, especially on the Liberal side, fear that if we do not do something of this nature the United States will do something at the border to make it more difficult for trade, commerce and services to go back and forth.

I want to play the devil's advocate for a second. Instead of the national identity card, what would the member propose in order to ensure that we have good and speedy commerce between both countries?

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank that particular member of the NDP for his comments. I know that he and I would probably agree on a lot of things and he could probably be a very comfortable member of our party. He would be on the left side of the fringe of it, but he could be very comfortable in our party because he is from a very democratic party that even votes on issues in caucus. I want to thank him for his question and I respect his views.

What we have right now is quite satisfactory to the Americans. When we are travelling across as individuals they accept passports. There is no problem whatsoever. There is also the Canpass and the Nexus system set-up. We can voluntarily go to the Americans, get our fingerprints done and get our pictures done. They give us a card and we get easy access to the United States.

We have the same thing coming the other way. If people live in Vancouver and travel down to Bellingham or Blaine quite a bit, they can go in on the Canadian side, fill out the forms and pre-register themselves. Then they can go into the fast lane so they do not have to line up with all the other cars to get through the border.

Those processes are there. They are very good and I am sure that they will be improved over the years. I think that is all we need between our countries. It works very well now.

Supply

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that was an excellent speech by the House leader of the Canadian Alliance, to say the least. It covered every point. It bears a little reinforcing with the firearms registry and all the troubles that it has. Now we are talking about registering not 7 million people but 33 million people. As for the \$2 billion to \$3 billion that it would cost to register all Canadians, could that money not be better used to reinforce our military, our RCMP, our police forces and our intelligence services, to actually deal with the terrorists who would attack our country?

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is a question in the mind of anybody in the House, including those of a lot of my Liberal colleagues, that if the gun control is any guide at all for the small amount there is, at \$1 billion and still running, to do this for every individual Canadian would probably be in the range of \$6 billion to \$12 billion.

I am sure that if we did a poll every Canadian would say that the number one issue is health care and then that the military needs more money. Everybody in the House knows the military needs more money except the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister and the defence minister. The defence committee of the House made a recommendation to give the defence department more money. The former solicitor general is sitting here, and I am sure he would agree with me that the RCMP could use more money, as could, certainly, the police forces across Canada. Then there is the \$1 billion we have wasted on this gun registry.

The government always talks about gun control. Guns, handguns, were controlled in this country for years, at a very minimal cost. It was not a problem. Duck hunters and deer hunters are not the problem in this country and we are spending \$1 billion. That money could be put into the police working on the streets and visiting schools. I know that in my own riding some of the police visits are not taking place anymore. That is a problem, because respect can be built for the police departments when they visit schools and do things like that. When money is cut from those agencies and put into a phony gun registry, that is not what the taxpayers of Canada want.

I would agree with my colleague that this would be a total waste of money and that it is not the way that taxpayers would like us to spend their money.

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Yolande Thibeault (Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you immediately that I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Louis-Hébert.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak, because the matter we are debating today strikes me as a vital one.

As the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has pointed out this morning, the most serious threat to privacy is the theft and misuse of a person's identity by another. Identity thefts cost Canadian society \$2.5 billion annually, which is why I believe it is important to ask some questions about this.

In November 2002, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration made a proposal. Without introducing any bill in the House of

Commons, the minister wanted to open up a debate on the possibility of creating a national identity card.

Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, identity has taken on vital importance.

As far as citizenship and immigration are concerned, the Government of Canada has a commitment to ensure the safety and well-being of Canadians. In addition to legislation on immigration and the protection of refugees, which came into effect in the summer of 2002, we are now making progress toward enhanced border security.

What the minister is proposing is to consult Canadians in connection with a national identity card. The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration is going to seek out Canadians' opinions on this and report the results back to the House.

For the moment, the government wishes to hear what Canadians have to say about a national identity card. In short, it is a matter of establishing a proper dialogue between the government and Canadians. In my opinion, such a debate is a very good thing. It is a demonstration of the healthy state of democracy in Canada.

If we enter into this debate with an open mind, privacy must remain a primary concern. Canada continues to play a lead role internationally in promoting human rights, in such forums as the United Nations, the Commonwealth and the Organization of American States. Domestically, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees everyone equal protection and equal benefits.

The Liberals have always been greatly concerned about protecting privacy as well as rights and freedoms. Let us not forget that we owe our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to the Liberals.

Many countries around the world already have a national identity card. This is not something the minister invented. France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain all have them. Belgium recently announced that it would be using smart card technology for its national identity card, to protect the integrity of the document and to better protect personal information.

The lessons that we can learn from what countries like Belgium are doing is that new technologies, like biometrics, are able to better protect Canadians' privacy. In today's world, institutions and ideas are undergoing fundamental change.

• (1530)

We must ensure that Canadians do not lag behind. The technologies that will be used, if Canadians so desire, will provide for unique biometric identifiers like fingerprints, facial recognition and iris scans to control people's identity. The precision and effectiveness of these new techniques are very promising.

The security measures used when such cards are issued will allow a considerable degree of certainty. Why not use the latest technology, such as biometrics, to guarantee the integrity of these documents, while improving the protection of privacy at the same time?

Supply

It is important to make a list of the benefits and the drawbacks of a national identity card and it is important to find out what Canadians think about this. I would encourage all my colleagues in the House and all Canadians to reflect on this issue.

Ms. Hélène Scherrer (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am following the debate on a national identity card with great interest, all the more so because I had the opportunity to listen to some entrepreneurs from my riding talk about new technologies that could be used to make the biometric portion of such a card.

I am also very happy to learn that the Standing Committee on Immigration and Citizenship is now touring Canada to consult Canadians about this matter.

In our country, identification documentation is a shared responsibility. The federal government, through Citizenship and Immigration Canada, is responsible for issuing immigration and citizenship documents. The provincial governments are responsible for issuing birth and death certificates.

These documents are called primary documentation. They are used to obtain all kinds of other documents, such as passports, driver's licences, and health cards.

However, in reality, we know full well that none of these are specifically meant to be used as identification. Most of them, however, are commonly accepted and used as such. Just recently, my daughter told me that, to attend a basketball tournament in the United States, she only had to show her health card with a photo or her driver's licence.

We also know that these documents have security features that vary considerably and some can be easily reproduced. Consequently, numerous attempts have been made to use fraudulent cards.

Theft or fraudulent use of such documents can present a security threat to Canadians, the integrity of government programs or economic prosperity.

In terms of government programs, for example, some documents have proven very easy to counterfeit, allowing certain people access to employment insurance, for example, or even welfare. This easy access has cost the various levels of government billions of dollars.

In Canada as elsewhere, there has been a shocking rise in fraud and identity theft. Despite cutting-edge technology, identify theft is rising in the industrialized world. It is clear that the easier the technology is to access, the easier the documents are to reproduce and obtain.

According to the Canadian Council of Better Business Bureaus, identity theft and fraudulent use of identity documents cost billions of dollars each year. Obviously these crimes affect consumers and companies and clearly have a negative impact on our economy.

In the current context, with the technology available to us, Canadians can be better protected against such theft and fraud. The Department of Citizenship and Immigration has accordingly been asked to coordinate the Government of Canada's efforts to strengthen document integrity.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada issues documents to citizens, permanent residents, foreign students, refugee claimants, temporary

workers, and visitors to Canada. Consequently, it is vital that these documents incorporate cutting-edge technology.

The new Permanent Resident Card is an extremely safe document that can include biometric identifiers. The Permanent Resident Card was introduced last year. Citizenship and Immigration Canada has already issued more than 170,000.

The card has been well received by clients and security experts. The International Card Manufacturers Association gave Canada's Permanent Resident Card two awards, and it has been referred to by U.S. experts as the most secure ID card in the world.

In fact, the Permanent Resident Card can be improved so as to include biometric technology. This is new technology that uses unique biometric identifiers, such as fingerprints, facial recognition or iris scans and can be used to verify an individual's identity with unprecedented precision.

In the United Kingdom, public consultation is currently underway on the introduction of a voluntary national identity card.

• (1535)

The government is fully aware of the concern about privacy, and this issue clearly remains a focus of discussion.

Privacy is a primary consideration. In Canada, we already have the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian privacy legislation, which ensure that the privacy of Canadian citizens is protected. Needless to say, any proposed national ID card will have to comply with government guidelines on the protection of personal information as well as with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

This is an important debate that touches on key issues, and we must consider those issues relating to security, privacy and citizenship, as almost everyone in this House has indicated in debate. There is also a need, in this debate, to remain objective, given how serious the issues under consideration are. We must steer clear of any sensationalism and examine the pros and cons of a national identity card in a calm and reasoned fashion.

This is how Canadians would want us to address the matter.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned the issue of privacy. Need I remind the House that, not too long ago, the government won its case and the right to transfer to the EI program information gathered at the border, so that EI benefits to people travelling to the U.S. for a week could be cut.

Supply

What about the privacy of Canadians? Information can be exchanged within the public service. The member made a mistake in her speech when she said that she thought the privacy of Canadians would be protected, as if the government would stop transferring information from one department to another. In fact, by going to court and winning its case, the government made a mockery of the privacy of Canadians.

• (1540)

Ms. Hélène Scherrer: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this debate is to give members on both sides of the House the opportunity to express their views about the security aspect of this issue, a crucial element in the implementation of a national identity card.

Anyone taking part in this debate can voice his or her concerns, suggest improvements or talk about any irritant at all. This debate will ensure that what my colleague has mentioned will never occur again. All suggestions are welcome.

I want to thank the opposition for raising this issue today. It gives us the opportunity to go over some very important issues.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding all the very relevant points that the member for Louis-Hébert made, many of which I can understand are legitimate aspects to the larger debate, I would ask her if she feels that the introduction of such a card warrants the overall costs.

In 2000, HRDC dealt with the idea of bringing in a national identity card. It was rejected by cabinet for two reasons: one was the privacy issue and the other was the projected cost of \$3.6 billion.

With the merits that she put forward in her speech, does the member think this is so necessary and so critical for the country that we should spend an estimated \$3.6 billion on a pig in a poke? We do not even know if it would achieve what it sets out to achieve.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Scherrer: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. In my speech, I talked about economic factors that have to be taken into consideration both in terms of the cost of such a card and in terms of the current costs related to the fraudulent use or falsification of various identity documents.

This debate will give us the opportunity to consider both the cost of producing such a card and the costs currently incurred because of the false documents that are in circulation and that are used to gain access to government programs. This is very costly for the economy, for consumers and for businesses.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, when looking at the systems that were put in place by the federal government, we can remember that, last year, the government had a program to help with the cost of heating fuel. Cheques were sent to people who were dead or in jail. Does the member trust the government to implement yet another system over which Canadians will have no control?

Ms. Hélène Scherrer: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I must trust most Canadians not to try to defraud the system. There will always be people who will try to cheat, but let us trust Canadians. They will certainly be honest in using the system.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on this opposition day. I would like to indicate that I will be sharing my time with the member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

First I wish to congratulate my colleagues from the party to the left—figuratively to the left, always to the left—the NDP, for the motion they introduced before us. That said, I will take the time to read it before discussing this issue:

That, in the opinion of this House, the introduction of a national identity card offends the principle of privacy and other civil rights of Canadians and this House therefore opposes its introduction.

It is important, in my view, to debate this before the government implements this type of tool to identify the public. First, let us remember that on November 13, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration launched this idea of creating a national ID card.

Some citizens already have this card, landed immigrants or permanent residents for instance. Nevertheless, what the government wants to do with the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration's idea is to expand this measure, this identification tool, and to create a card. It will probably be an electronic card; that is what the government is saying. It is a smart card—a memory card—that would contain certain information about citizens.

Take fingerprints for example. This card would contain a person's fingerprints. Questions come to mind.

What are the government's true intentions with this measure? The government says that naturally it is to facilitate travel to the U.S., to make it so that Canadians will not have to have a visa to travel outside the country, especially to the United States.

We need to think about this. The government's idea raises some questions.

First, how should we define identity? Second, with respect to this national identity card, who is it for? Third, how important is it?

Let us recall a number of things, if this card is to exist. Let us not lose sight of the current system in which we are living. We, in this modern society, are not living in a police state. On the contrary, we live in a constitutional state, in a society that abides by the rule of law, which recognizes the right to anonymity, more specifically the right to privacy. This is recognized in societies that respect the rule of law, in societies such as ours.

Therefore, there is a real danger—I will quote the privacy commissioner in a moment—that we could shift from a constitutional state to a police state. I am sure that this is not the intention of the government, because we must protect the privacy of citizens.

•(1545)

I remind members that on November 1, 2002, the privacy commissioner said that in Canada, it has been well established that, and I quote:

—individuals do not have to identify themselves to police unless they are being arrested or unless they are carrying out a licensed activity such as driving.

He added, and this is exactly what I was referring to earlier in my comments:

The right to anonymity with regard to the state is a crucial privacy right.

Under the rule of law, protecting this privacy is fundamental. As far as I am concerned, it is clear that this type of national identity card could lead to a significant shift from a constitutional state to a police state, something that worries me as a citizen.

We all remember the HRDC megafile fiasco, where information on the public was gathered, to the great consternation of Quebeckers and Canadians. There was very strong pressure to abolish this centralized file. It is important to remember that the public mobilized on this issue specifically to put a stop to a centralized file, to put an end to a Big Brother state in a supposed democracy. So Quebeckers and Canadians thought that this centralized file violated their privacy.

The second important aspect relates to costs. In my opinion, the implementation costs of this kind of tool, that the state wants to use as a means of control and of centralizing information on its citizens, should be considered.

We must remember the past errors of this government. Think of the firearms registry, a program that should have cost only \$2 million according to the government's estimates. But the costs spiralled upward. Instead of the estimated \$2 million, this kind of program cost Canadian taxpayers over a billion dollars. This was a single-purpose program.

One may well be concerned about the cost estimate the government over there is going to give for a national identity card.

There is another aspect as well: the cost of identity fraud. It is wrong to say that this card cannot be counterfeited. We know the estimated annual cost to consumers, banks and credit card companies of card fraud is estimated by the Canadian Council of Better Business Bureaus at \$2.5 billion.

We feel that there will be costs, not only the cost of implementing this program, this measure, but also the cost related to fraud. I think therefore that it is important to have a clear estimate of those costs.

The danger in this card is that it is not restrictive. There is a risk of this just being the first step on a slippery slope, with the government expanding its uses later on. The danger lies in the fact that we have a government that would put in place a measure that would start out just identifying citizens but could end up encompassing identification, medical records and banking information. This we are rejecting.

•(1550)

I will reiterate in closing the need for caution. Prudence and caution in a matter such as this are a far better route to take than excessive haste.

Supply

So, the reservations we have on this are many. I personally am completely opposed to the creation of a tool such as this one, which will eventually turn a constitutional state into a police state, where big brother can intrude on our fellow citizens' privacy.

[English]

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member and all members for participating in the debate. I have a question for the member. He totally opposed the concept of an ID card. As he knows, we are only discussing it today. There is no decision on this, or bill or motion whatsoever.

For the purpose of discussion, I would ask the member to consider the following.

First, The objectives of this ID card will be set by Canadians. As he knows, the committee is travelling across the country to hear witnesses. Second, the information on the card will be put there by Canadians. We will put information on the card that we want, not information that will be forced. That is the purpose of these discussions. Third, the purpose of this card is to serve Canadians. We have to define what purposes this card will serve.

If all these three objectives or points are satisfied in the system, would he support the concept of an ID card or would he still be totally opposed to having an ID card in the country?

•(1555)

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my speech, there is a real danger of losing control. The danger is that a restrictive card will turn into a multiple use or multi-purpose card.

I would like to quote the Privacy Commissioner who had the same concerns. He reminded us, not so long ago, and I quote:

Just remember that income taxes were supposed to be a temporary measure to help finance the First World War. And Social Insurance Numbers were only supposed to be used for administering the social insurance system.

So we have to be very careful whenever someone proposes to limit our right to privacy, just for a little while or just because the benefits will be very attractive.

I would also point out that the privacy Commissioner told us, and I will quote only one passage:

I cannot find any justification for establishing a national identity card, especially because it is totally useless in the fight against terrorism.

We must be careful with this kind of card because there is a clear danger of using a restrictive card for multiple purposes. I think that protecting privacy is the underlying foundation of the rule of law, which Canadians and Quebeckers espouse, and I think that this card would be the first step on the slippery slope to invading that privacy.

Supply

I do not believe that this kind of card can resolve the various problems that exist, naturally, and I am convinced that it is not the best way for the government to reach its objectives.

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his intervention. I more or less share his view on privacy.

I think he developed this point and the issue of related costs extensively. Just look at the gun registry. With that boondoggle as an example, we can imagine that to create a program of this importance and magnitude, the related costs would be off the chart.

I have a question for him, I would like his opinion. Does he not believe that this card is perhaps just to satisfy our American neighbours? They could easily identify us by scanning our cards and thus keep tabs on their little neighbour, their little cousin, Canada.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, there are mechanisms in place for a citizen to apply for a visa. The risk is in information sharing.

Canadian sovereignty is not a virtual thing. There is a definite risk. As my colleague reminded us, the Americans want a central database. There is a risk this data will be shared. I think this is simply being done to please the Americans. We can do without this measure, this kind of tool.

I am quite serious when I say that Canada has to maintain its sovereignty vis-à-vis the United States. I think we would be going down a slippery slope with this card. Everyone who promotes Canadian sovereignty has to beware of the risk that Americans will be able to obtain certain information.

There is a clear risk of falsifying a database. I think the government is doing this just to please the Americans.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the member for Rosemont—Petite-Patrie for his excellent speech. Indeed, we must also congratulate the New Democratic Party for the motion that was moved, and which reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the introduction of a national identity card offends the principle of privacy and other civil rights of Canadians and this House therefore opposes its introduction.

• (1600)

We have assessed this situation. Obviously, we know that the national identity card is in the planning stages. However, it is important to remember that a few months ago there was another plan in a completely different area, a draft bill to tighten the disability tax credit. The type of action we are seeing today is what led the government to back down and withdraw that bill that made no sense.

In fact, it was learned that a judge had ruled that persons with disabilities had a right to the credit. Instead of listening to the courts, the government tried to tighten the criteria. Efforts were made similar to today's motion. So far, unless the budget contains surprises, we will have managed to protect persons with disabilities from the government's plan.

Today's debate is similarly important. The Bloc Québécois is against an obligatory national identity card. I would like to relate a personal experience of mine.

A few years ago, the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities was looking into the social insurance card. We reviewed the situation. We wondered why there were hundreds of thousands of social insurance cards that had problems. Cards belonging to deceased persons were still active. Particularly since the card, which was created for government purposes initially, such as income tax and employment insurance, had become the norm in the private sector. The whole banking industry used it; it was used in credit investigations and in all sorts of areas, when that was not the original intent. Because we were not careful enough at the beginning, we had gotten to this point.

So, we need to ensure that we never run into the same problem with a national identity card. The best way to avoid that is not to have such a card, because we do not really need it. It is not an essential tool, especially if it contains information like social insurance number, date of birth or, with today's technologies, all kinds of other information that could be used eventually to monitor individuals, even law-abiding citizens who have never been trouble with the law.

This card, however, could be used to take control, collect information and ensure that Canadian citizens are required to carry at all times a card that is not really necessary. We should always be very careful when dealing with such requests.

We all remember the fiasco with the megafile of the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency and Human Resources Development Canada. Information that had been collected for a very specific purpose was being used for all kinds of things. There is no need to make matters worse.

It must be kept in mind that the idea for this card dates back to last November 13, when an immigration agreement was signed between Ottawa and Manitoba. The minister took advantage of that opportunity to voice the opinion that an identity card similar to the one now issued to landed immigrants and permanent residents might be used by all Canadians, and of course all Quebecers.

The minister ought to have explored his idea in greater depth, asked for research to be done into it by his department, and looked into the consequences before tossing out such an idea. Now everyone is up in arms about it, hence this opposition day to let the public know and clearly understand the danger of such a measure.

Creation of a national identity card raises a number of issues. At the present time, there is no card used specifically for personal identification. People can use their driver's licence, their health card, their Maple Leaf card, their passport. The reason there is no such card is that we live in a constitutional state and not a police state.

• (1605)

A peace officer cannot, for example, demand that we identify ourselves simply because we are walking in a park. We are entitled to anonymity and privacy; this is an acknowledged right and one that distinguishes us from other countries. We know that from what we see in movies, or when we travel abroad. Here, individuals feel truly protected. They feel that they are full-fledged citizens. They do not feel that someone constantly has an eye on them, nor do they feel obliged to behave in such a way as to please the state.

It is understandable that an extraordinary syndrome has developed in the United States in the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, and we can understand their reaction. We must not end up going beyond the objectives set, particularly when even those objectives are not necessary.

Then there is the whole matter of the costs relating to such a card. We have the example of gun control. We remember the debate on the principle behind gun control. Perhaps there is a lesson to be learned, by looking at the consequences of having a very restrictive law with numerous obligations. We cannot tell where the introduction of this card might lead us, as far as unnecessary additional obligations and costs are concerned. The card in itself is not essential.

Creating a national identity card would mean having a computer system containing information. If the card contained biometric data, the system would have to be able to read these data and compare them with a central registry. If only names, addresses, gender and height appeared on the card, this would not be too problematic, but this kind of information on a national identity card is almost useless and would not justify significant government expenditures on such a program.

If such a card is desirable, it is because it has a purpose. This purpose is not desirable. It is not viable; it is not appropriate in a democracy such as ours.

Essentially, the authorities will not say that a whole lot of information would be kept on this card, as this might frighten the public. But what about in five or ten years, when people are used to carrying around a national identity card? Why not add additional information?

In this regard, the Privacy Commissioner, Mr. Radwanski, who is the watchdog, if you will, concerning this kind of government policy, has issued a warning. He said:

Just remember that income tax was supposed to be a temporary measure to finance the second world war. And that social insurance numbers were only supposed to be used to administer the social insurance system.

These two examples show just how necessary specific guidelines are with regard to such a card which, at most, could be voluntary. On one hand, if the card were issued and it were impossible to add information considered essential, then why have it; however, if this information were integrated into our legal system, why create such a card when it is not needed?

Supply

Overall, the world has taken a balanced approach. Some countries have national identity cards, such as Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras, Malaysia, Singapore, Pakistan, and Kenya. Other countries do not have national identity cards: Ireland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Mexico, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Bangladesh, Korea and Taiwan.

Both lists include models of democracy and others that are not really considered models of democracy. The card in itself has not brought about any improvement in this regard and can be a dangerous tool.

Getting back to the Privacy Commissioner, in his 2001-02 annual report, he clearly opposed the concept of a national identity card. He said, and I quote:

Given the Government's current behavior on other privacy matters, it is difficult to avoid fearing that this means that it wishes to introduce such a card.

He obviously has very serious concerns. He then added:

I can find no justification for a national identity card—

He further added:

Rather than a "debate" about a grave and needless intrusion, Canada needs clear acknowledgement by the Government that the fundamental privacy right of anonymity as we go about our day-to-day lives is too important to abrogate for no apparent reason.

I think that all this criticism should prompt the minister to put this idea on hold, to study its relevance if he so wishes, to see what is being done in other countries. However, I think that this idea has not been properly thought through and that, basically, it does not meet the standards of a democracy such as ours.

• (1610)

That is why the Bloc Québécois believes that, as stated in the motion:

—the introduction of a national identity card offends the principle of privacy and other civil rights of Canadians and this House therefore opposes its introduction.

That is the position of the Bloc Québécois in this debate.

Ms. Carole-Marie Allard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am a little disappointed to see the Bloc Québécois take such a strong position against this proposal by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, which I think deserves to be debated thoroughly.

We know that, ever since the terrorist attacks of September 11, security concerns have prompted governments to put a lot of emphasis on formal proof of identity throughout the world, including in Canada.

In the near future, the ability of Canadian citizens and permanent residents to cross international borders will increasingly depend on the integrity of their identity papers and their travel documents.

Would it not be realistic to think that we could make greater use of our advanced technologies, such as biometrics, to guarantee the integrity of these documents while enhancing privacy?

I want to ask this to the member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques. Does he not think that the strong position that he and his party are taking today against this proposal could hurt the ability of Canadians to travel freely, given the fears that exist across the border?

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Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, currently there is no card and we travel freely. I do not think that there is any problem at this time.

As for what the Americans want, I do not think that we should constantly do whatever the Americans want of us. We have to be able to stand up to them. The current government has not set a good example when it comes to Iraq, but it should at least do so on issues like this, and stand up for its national sovereignty.

The member is heckling me, but I would like to give the position of the Privacy Commissioner, Mr. Radwanski, as set out in his annual report. Mr. Radwanski is not a member of the Bloc Québécois, but someone who was appointed by the government. I will quote him briefly.

Given the Government's current behaviour on other privacy matters, it is difficult to avoid fearing that this means that it wishes to introduce such a card.

That would be another huge blow to privacy rights. In Canada, we are not required to carry any identification—let alone to identify ourselves on demand—unless we are carrying out a licensed activity such as driving. Introducing a national identity card, even if it were “voluntary” at first, would push us toward becoming the kind of society where the police can stop anyone on the street and demand, “Your papers, please”.

The notion of the Government of Canada fingerprinting or eyeball-scanning every citizen for such a card is, of course, all the more abhorrent.

I would like to finish with the last sentence:

I can find no justification for a national identity card—

This is not a member of the Bloc Québécois who wrote this, nor a member of the New Democratic Party, nor a government member, this is the Privacy Commissioner. He was appointed by this government. I think that, in his capacity as watch dog, he deserves to be listened to.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank my colleague from the Bloc Québécois for his speech.

I find it interesting that he is not open to the idea of a identity card, now that we have the gun registry and blenders and screwdrivers have to be registered too . What kind of system is this? This system was supposed to cost \$2 million and now it is up to \$1 billion. Imagine what it would cost to implement an ID card in Canada.

I would like the member to answer the following question. Why would we have to have an ID card when the Americans are not even ready to have one? Why can we not have our own Canadian sovereignty? Do we always have to listen to the Americans, just because the Liberals say so?

•(1615)

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, I think the member for Acadie—Bathurst may have just put his finger on a big problem, which is that the minister proposed this idea without necessarily giving it much thought.

If he had given it any thought at all, he would have realized that if we ever decided we wanted a card, we would at least need the reciprocity of our neighbour, for whom we are doing this. If not, we really look like someone who falls all over himself to please his neighbour without ever being asked to do so or having his efforts reciprocated.

That would be like saying that even though I have a lovely home and garden I am going to build a wall around it so as not to make my neighbour feel bad. My neighbour would at least have to ask first before I decide to do something like that.

That is where I will conclude. I think the minister is doing quite a bit of winging it on this one. Nevertheless, what the public wants is a guarantee that his plan will be shelved and that we will not have this issue hanging over our head for years to come.

[*English*]

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

First, this is a good opportunity to discuss this particular issue. I am a bit surprised at what is said in the New Democratic Party's motion about the introduction of a national identity card. There has been no discussion or comment made about an introduction of any such card. There has only been a theoretical discussion about this issue. I think it is important. If we cannot have that kind of discussion in the House, then it is a sad day. Clearly there are discussions as to whether or not Canadians would be interested in this for various reasons.

The first question that comes to mind is: What would be the purpose of a national identity card? Why would we have one and, if we had one, what information would be put on that card?

Mr. Pat Martin: Good questions.

Mr. Bryon Wilfert: My colleague across the way says that those are good questions. Yes, but they are fundamental questions. They are fundamental because we live in an information society. We live in a society where we continually get all sorts of information. We carry all sorts of identification on us, such as a driver's licence. We see the misuse of SIN cards. I often see people who produce a SIN card to sign a cheque. That was not the purpose of it. It was to be used for social policies and for the government to retrieve information.

As some of the members know, the human resources development committee reviewed this issue a few years ago. We reviewed it before 9/11. Since 9/11 there has been increasing discussion about this. For example, we have looked at the implications of Canadian citizens going to the United States. Some members of our society have been randomly taken aside and had their identity and documents questioned. That obviously raises serious questions in this country. It raises questions as to whether or not we should be looking at producing some kind of information that would be clear and of the highest technology. In fact, the minister has talked about that.

We want a secure system for Canadians. We want Canadians to feel secure, but we also want to make sure that those kinds of situations do not occur either crossing the United States or anywhere else. That is important.

We have a smart card to some degree already. We have a card for people who travel often to the United States on business. They have an access card that allows them to go back and forth, again for very limited purposes.

I for one am very concerned about the amount of information we give out to government on all kinds of topics. In the United States it is said that the government has 15 to 20 active files on every American. That obviously is a concern.

Therefore the question comes back to the purpose of the card. If we had a card, what would we use it for? Presumably, we want to cut down on fraud. We want to cut down on Canadians being hassled at the border. We want to make sure that the card itself will be used for a purpose. It may be a voluntary card or a mandatory card. Again, we have not gone down that road and we may never go down that road.

However we are at the point of discussion. Since 9/11 there have been and continues to be concerns about security. I am concerned about the kind of information that would go into the card. We heard colleagues today say that they had lost their wallets. It only happened to me once but it was like my life passed in front of me because I lost everything. Mr. Speaker, I am sure you have never lost your wallet, but if you have you know that you have to contact all sorts of agencies with regard to your driver's licence, health card and you name it. That obviously is a problem. Everything could be on one card, but again it would require the type of technology that would be important in terms of making sure that it could not be tampered with.

The minister has talked about the sophistication of technology. He talked about dealing with the issue of counterfeiting.

• (1620)

Some of the tools, which I know the minister has mentioned in a hypothetical situation in speaking about what other countries have been looking at, are biometric identifiers, iris scans, fingerprinting and other techniques, whether it be at airports or at border crossings.

Every country faces new challenges and they are responding. In fact, the United Kingdom is considering the introduction of a voluntary entitlement card for those citizens who would feel more secure if they had that card for identification.

The United States is considering biometric identification for travel documents and uniform standards for state drivers' licences. Again, these are in the discussion stage.

In a recent poll in the United Kingdom, 60% of respondents strongly supported the introduction of an entitlement card incorporating advanced biometric features.

What kind of technology would be used? We have come a long way from the days of having paper documents. Therefore we would have to see the advances in terms of that technology and how that could be applied.

There are indications that Canadians in every region of the country are concerned about security issues. I know my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, will probably expand on this, but Citizenship and Immigration Canada commissioned a telephone survey of Canadians to gauge the attitudes of Canadians with regard

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to a national identity card incorporating biometric features and to get some feedback.

The responsible thing to do is to get public opinion and to see what the public is saying about this. Those surveyed expressed a range of opinions, as one might expect, as to whether a national identity card should be mandatory or voluntary, and whether it should have biometric features or not. The overwhelming finding was that nearly seven out of ten Canadians supported some kind of card. It did not matter what their age, gender, education or income level. Identity was seen as problem particularly in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec.

However we again go back to the kind of information that would go into a card. I have heard provincial governments speak about this as well. The card could contain the health care card, the driver's licence and so on. That might make it very secure because of the nature of the technology, but what happens if it is lost? What are the backups for that? Those are issues that we have to talk about.

I think it is important that we have a fundamental discussion on this, but I want to assure members that no one, and certainly no one on this side of the House, has suggested for a moment that there will be an introduction of anything. What we have suggested is that in light of security concerns since 9/11 that such a fundamental discussion is important. It is taking place in Great Britain, Australia, the United States and elsewhere.

On the issue of biometrics, four out of five Canadians believe that the use of biometrics would make it harder for illegal immigrants to use fake documents to abuse social programs, such as employment insurance and health care. Those are comments that the department has heard.

This is not to say, of course, that we have unwavering faith in technology. I for one do not believe that technology is the be all and end all but I do believe that where there are advancements we should look at those and that our thinking should also advance to look at how that technology might be used.

I will go back to my point earlier. I am very concerned about the amount of information we give away. If we decided to introduce a card we would have to be very clear and very restrictive about the kind of information Canadians would want to see in that card. I think that is important.

I was a little concerned that the NDP motion suggested that we would not even talk about an introduction. I think it is at least fair to have the debate. I congratulate colleagues on the other side for raising the debate, although I was surprised that they said that we should not even talk about the introduction of a card. Otherwise, I guess there is not much to talk about. I think there is and I think the concerns that Canadians have raised are worth debating. I appreciate the issue being discussed here today.

• (1625)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my colleague across the floor, but is he not worried?

Supply

We know how the registration of guns has gone. It was supposed to cost \$2 million and it cost \$1 billion for registration. The member talked about the technology of today. Is he not worried about this type of a card, if the technology is good enough to produce an identification card such as the one about which we are talking?

It is good that we are having this discussion and that is why we brought this motion to the House of Commons.

Is he not worried that with the technology of today, if somebody loses a wallet or a card, people who are smart enough will be able to decode and use that card? They will have all the information on the person and that person will lose his or her privacy. We have thousands and thousand of social insurance numbers which the government cannot control those.

I am not trying to blame the government, but those are facts of life. Can we afford to make the mistake of having a card that will give information to people who we surely do not want to have it? Why be dictated to by the Americans? They are not willing to have a card like this yet they are suggesting that we should. Where is our sovereignty as Canadians? That is the question that we have to ask to ourselves. That is why it is good to have this discussion. Could the member comment on that?

Mr. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. First, I believe the discussion has not been prompted, and I hope it has not been prompted, because the United States or any other country is suggesting that Canada should have an identity card. It has to be a made in Canada solution to a made in Canada issue. The Australians had this debate more than six or seven years ago. At that time they said no.

On the issue of technology, I do not have the answer on whether the card could be reproduced if it were lost. With the state of the art technology which we have today, we would have to be pretty sure. As members know, we now have new passports which are supposed to be 99.9% effective against reproduction. Again as technology advances, we will have to look at those things.

The member raises an important point. It must be a made in Canada decision. However if we do that, and we should, we have to ensure that the value of the documentation is beyond reproach, whether it is passports or whatever it happens to be that we might use to identify ourselves.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for my friend on the Liberal side.

First, why does the government feel it would be necessary to create this new data base, this new card program, to address a security concern, when it mainly would deal with law-abiding citizens? If the government has a problem with security and terrorism, it should focus its efforts and concentrate on that area rather than create this huge new registration of people through a national identity card program.

Second, does he not think that the minister should come forward with at least some proposals on how much this might cost or perhaps do some test runs on a voluntary basis with the kind of technology about which he talks? Does he not think this would be helpful in swaying people to think his way about the idea of a national identity card?

• (1630)

Mr. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, first, all the minister has done is asked for a public discussion. He wants to engage Canadians as we are engaging parliamentarians. There has been no proposal. Maybe the question the hon. gentleman asked about cost would be more appropriate if we came to the conclusion that we wanted to go further with this issue.

I point out to the hon. gentleman that we had an issue about too many SIN cards and the difficulty with that, whether we should reproduce SIN cards and whether we would use the same type of SIN card, which is questionable, or go to new technology. That was the debate a few years ago. Again in light of 9/11 we are having this new debate.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order please. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: The hon. member for Cariboo—Chilcotin, The Environment; the hon. member for Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, Softwood lumber.

[*English*]

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank all members who have participated in the debate today because it is an important discussion.

I would also like to mention that this is the very first time in my over nine years of parliamentary life that we have a minister asking us our opinions before drafting any line in a law. That should be applauded.

Most members of Parliament complain, backbenchers especially, saying that they have no say in what is being proposed. They say that everything is done in the back rooms with the bureaucrats, that it is presented that way and that they have to work with their party or else.

Here we have a new system. The minister has proposed that we have an open and frank discussion with parliamentarians. Also the committee is travelling across the country to get input from citizens at large to ensure we know what they think before we go any further.

The motion we are debating speaks to the introduction of a national identity card. There is no such thing being introduced today. We are only asking for a debate, discussion, ideas, how to do it, where to do it and what to put on the card, if we were to have a card.

The way the hon. member of the NDP has proposed the motion on the introduction of an national identity card is, at best, misleading. We should take into consideration the fact that this is not the introduction of anything. It is simply a discussion of an idea.

Many people have mentioned that the U.S. has not asked for the ID card so why are we discussing it. That is fine. If the U.S. asked for it, then we could say that we were caving in to the U.S. policy. Because the U.S. has not asked for it, people want to know why we want to have ID cards. Either way, the opposition's job is to find us guilty but I do not think the technique will work.

As was mentioned earlier, over 100 countries in the world use the cards. Eleven of the fifteen EU countries have ID cards. People are using them. The issue is what kind of information we would like to have on the card or for what purpose it would be used. That is the key question we have to answer.

I believe in October last year the U.S. proposed fingerprinting Canadians who were born in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan and Yemen. Canada is a multicultural country. We have hundreds of thousands of Canadians who were born in those countries. When they crossed the U.S. border they had to be fingerprinted for no reason.

A businessman from my riding of Brampton Centre travelled across the border to the U.S. He has plants in Connecticut, Philadelphia and in Europe. He went with his staff to the States and then from there to Europe. He was stopped at the border. They wanted to fingerprint him and get his mug shot as if he were a common criminal. This is totally unacceptable.

If we ever have cards, we have to ensure that every Canadian has one regardless from where they come, or where they were born, or in what province they were born or in what province they live. It has to be one card, one ID available for everybody, if we ever have these cards.

I met with U.S. Ambassador Cellucci to raise the issue of fingerprinting Canadians. He agreed with me. It was a wrong policy but the Americans needed to do it, he said. At the end of the day I think they realized it was the wrong and they changed it. They no longer fingerprint individuals based on the place of birth. Rather they base it on what people have been doing or what they may be capable of doing in the future, if they go the States.

It was mentioned earlier that a survey was done on this issue. It said that 70% of Canadians supported a voluntary ID form. While there is a huge support for this, we do not know what kind of information we would like to see on the card. If it is used for border crossings only, then it would probably only need to contain fingerprints. In the scanning of the card, if the fingerprints matched then there would be no need to ask for a name, place of birth, country of origin, religion, et cetera. It would take 10 or 15 seconds and the person could then cross the border. They would be home free like everybody else.

• (1635)

In committee last week the member for Laval Centre said that her credit card had been stolen and she had to pay a lot of money. Whoever stole her card abused it and she was out a few thousand dollars. I can give the House an example of what happened to me.

Last year I received my American Express bill and there was a charge on it of \$729. It was for travel from Ottawa to Winnipeg. I did not buy the ticket. I did not know the person who bought the ticket and had never in fact heard of anyone by that name. I was charged \$729 for travel I did not take and for a ticket I never bought. It took me six months to clear that file. I phoned American Express and Air Canada. I had to get a lawyer. I had to sign documents stating that I had never benefited from the ticket. It took me six months to clear my name. This is the kind of hassle people go through when they lose any kind of ID.

Supply

The identity card we are talking about today cannot be forged. Every person has fingerprints that belong only to them. Nobody can duplicate somebody's fingerprint. Safety wise this is very important.

There are about 12,000 fraud cases annually. Those 12,000 victims have to pay both in inconvenience and money, along with the headaches. This fraud costs Canadian taxpayers \$2.5 billion every year. If we can save Canadians money and headaches, then everybody will be happy. There is no point in saying that we cannot do this because it will infringe on human rights. It all depends on the purpose of the card.

As I mentioned earlier, we are only having a discussion today. Nobody is proposing anything. We would like to get input from all members of Parliament. Some members are for an identity card, others are against it. That is fine. However, at the end of the day, the real issue is what kind of card would a person like to have? What information should be on the card? For what purpose will it be used?

In Canada we have 13 different birth certificates and 13 different licences, one for each province and territory. It is a big headache for people who go from one province to another. After September 11 last year there was an issue in Quebec with regard to Quebec birth certificates. Some were not accepted by the passport office. There are lots of problems.

This card could be one uniform ID card for every Canadian citizen. We will not force anything on anybody. For those who do not wish to have the card, that is their prerogative. I personally would like to have it, but that is my decision to make. Nobody can force me to have an ID card.

If there is a need for this identity card, I hope every person will take advantage of it. This is the way to go. At issue is what information will this ID card contain and what purpose will it serve?

• (1640)

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, I do not see the need for identity cards. I find it amazing that the Liberals would even suggest this grandiose proposal without putting an estimate of the cost on it. Who would ever buy a house or a car without knowing the cost? I sold cars for 20 years and nobody ever bought a car without first knowing the price. It just does not work that way. Only the Liberals would come up with a plan like this.

This is the same group that invented the gun registry and said that it would cost \$2 million. Some people now think it might cost only a billion and some think it will cost a lot more than that. How can the Liberals ask anybody to pass opinion on this issue if they do not put a price on it? If they cannot register firearms that do not move, how will they ever register 30 million people who move around and have transactions and travel everyday? How will they ever track them if they cannot even register firearms?

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows we cannot give any estimate if we do not have any details.

Supply

The purpose of this discussion today is to find out from members what should be put in the card, if we ever have a card. Once we know what we want in the card and what it will be used for, then it will be easy to estimate how much it will cost. It is unfair to ask for an estimate for a card, if we do not know for what it will be used.

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the member referred to a survey. I misunderstood whether it was 7% or 70% support from the Canadian public for a national ID card. I question that very many Canadians would support it.

On behalf of all Canadians my concern with the government is the same one I had with the firearms registry. When the government trotted out statistics in court cases in the lead-up to establishing the registry, it misused and overstated statistics to further its argument. Those statistics were repudiated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and have since been shown by the Auditor General to be totally wrong.

For my benefit and the benefit of the House, I would ask the member to go over what the survey he was referring to actually said.

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian: Mr. Speaker, roughly 3,000 people were surveyed and 70% of them supported the idea of having some form of ID card.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, further along those lines with respect to that poll, I wonder what the response would have been if the people had been asked what if the ID card were mandatory so a person could not leave the house without it. If people were stopped while going to the grocery store to buy a newspaper and they did not have their ID cards, the police could actually have cause to investigate them and hold them overnight. If the question had been phrased in that context, I do not think there would be a single Canadian who would want a "show me your papers" scenario.

I think the poll the hon. member referred to is misleading. A much different question should have been asked.

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian: Mr. Speaker, if the NDP does not believe that poll, it could conduct its own poll and pay for it from its own money. It would find out that is the case.

There is no need for us to mislead the public. When we have a discussion, we like to give all the information we have to members of Parliament so we can have an informed, intelligent debate. There is no intent on anybody's part to mislead anybody or to get different information.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for instance, today, if you lose your passport, it only contains a picture and an address, and it is an official government document. With today's technology, an identity card contains important private information that could end up in the wrong hands.

• (1645)

[*English*]

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, maybe passports, driver's licences, birth certificates and a person's landing papers can be forged, but in this case the ID is based on a person's iris and fingerprint. They cannot be forged. The member's fingerprint

and iris belong only to him. Nobody can duplicate them. They are his personally as a human being.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to address the motion presented to us by the New Democratic Party. First, for the benefit of the House, I want to read the actual motion:

That, in the opinion of this House, the introduction of a national identity card offends the principle of privacy and other civil rights of Canadians and this House therefore opposes its introduction.

Mr. Speaker, as you and other parties know, the Canadian Alliance is supporting the motion. We do oppose the introduction of an identity card.

It is interesting, especially for my friend the member for Winnipeg Centre, who is now the critic for the Canadian Alliance. He is not only critiquing the government side, he is critiquing the Canadian Alliance in that he referred in question period today to a cabal of Alliance members and Liberal members. I am wondering what he is going to tell his party members now that the Alliance and the NDP are actually agreeing on some issues. I think it shows that in this House there are times when we can set partisanship aside and really judge the merit of an idea. That is certainly what we are doing in this case.

There are two main reasons I want to put forward that many members have touched on before with respect to why we oppose the introduction of an identity card. One obviously deals with the whole privacy issue. The second one deals with the concerns about the competence of the government in dealing with other databases. The third is not a concern but is more what has been revealed during the debate, which is the fact that the government simply has been unable to answer some basic fundamental questions. Before Liberal members introduce something as earth changing as this, surely they should do their homework and be able to answer some of these questions.

It is interesting that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has proposed this idea but members of his own caucus and members of his own cabinet have expressed opposition to the card. The Minister of National Revenue has said it makes her nervous and she does not think we need it. Members of his own caucus from London and elsewhere have said that this is simply a bad idea and we should not go forward with it.

The minister has said that it is simply in response to security concerns. There are many other things the government could do in the first place to address other security concerns, namely deal with issues at the border without introducing such a card.

Supply

In looking at the concerns, I will deal with the whole issue of privacy first. The Privacy Commissioner, George Radwanski, has actually said that the new card is part of a growing intrusion of government into the private lives of Canadians. He also criticized this specific proposal when he said a national ID card tends to end up being linked to data. He said that it tends to facilitate compiling more and more data about every single Canadian which of course then becomes subject to all kinds of intrusions, to say nothing of the spectacle of the government in a mandatory way; even if it begins as a voluntary measure, these things eventually become mandatory.

That is true. If this starts out as voluntary, and members have said that this should be voluntary, then the question becomes why would a person not want this national ID card? Is that person hiding something and he or she does not want this fingerprint and retina scan data? Obviously people can travel more quickly between countries if they provide this information but if there is a national ID card and someone chooses not to participate, then the onus obviously is placed on that person to justify why he or she is not participating.

This is very fundamental, particularly for those of us who are libertarian in nature about the whole issue of government. We believe there should be a sphere of privacy for individual citizens. They should have certain rights. They should not be subject to government involvement in every aspect of their lives. One of my biggest concerns about the government is it introduces legislation and regulations and it is regulating more and more of our everyday lives which it does not need to.

We should go back to the great philosophers who really developed the parliamentary principles, people like John Locke. We should heed their words and their concerns about government being too involved in our daily lives.

• (1650)

There is the philosopher Thomas Hobbes and his *Leviathan*. He was considered to be an authoritarian philosopher because he favoured a strong sovereign. Even he said that we should have a circumference around the powers of the sovereign and there are things that individual citizens should not be subject to. That is something the Privacy Commissioner has said over and over again and which we have to pay attention to.

If we allow government to simply encroach more and more on our rights as citizens, in the end we do not develop a healthy community. We do not develop citizens. We develop subjects. That is certainly a trend we want to fight against.

We in the Canadian Alliance certainly heed the concerns of the Privacy Commissioner with respect to the ID card. He also raised concerns about the whole technological problems with such a card. During questions and comments today it has been revealed that the government simply does not know the full purpose of the card. Also, the government has not really addressed any technological problems.

A previous speaker said there were no concerns with security and it is very secure. In a day and age when we know hackers are very prevalent and we have seen problems with other database systems, to say that a system is 100% secure is simply foolish without actually having a system present that Canadians can view. The fact is that

with a lot of the other databases that have gone awry, why should we assume that the government would handle this database any better?

Before I go to the question of confidence, I want to touch upon the hearings today. The Information and Privacy Commissioner for Prince Edward Island, Karen Rose, appeared before the committee today. She is opposed to the development of a national identification card, especially with biometrics. She gave three reasons why she is opposed.

She said that a national ID card would be an unprecedented invasion of the privacy of Canadians due to the establishment of a national database of personal information and because it would require Canadians to identify themselves on demand.

Second, she said that there is no evidence that a national identification card would achieve the purposes it sets out to achieve. That is the question we constantly have to ask ourselves. Aristotle, who was steeped in philosophy, always said to ask oneself why. That is the most fundamental question. We always view things in a teleological manner. We always ask what is the purpose, the why question. We ask ourselves the purpose. We identify the purpose. Then we establish whether what we are doing will actually fulfill the purpose that have set out.

What Karen Rose is saying is that it is not going to fulfill the purpose that is actually being set out. Clearly, members on this side of the House have exposed that the government does not know what this card will fulfill, even the purpose that it is setting for it.

Her third concern is that the very existence of such a card could open the floodgates to drastically increase police powers as well as the collection of personal information of every Canadian, and would change the nature of our free society.

This is another point that goes back to the whole sphere of privacy. It also touches upon a very fundamental issue about law and about the use of police resources. The use of our police resources should be very limited, but it should be utilized in a very effective way to combat against those who break the law.

The fundamental basis of law should be the protection of persons and their property. Those people who offend against persons or their property should certainly be pursued and should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. We should not be using our laws and our police resources to move beyond that and set up an ID card which would not accomplish those goals and would basically be an invasion of privacy.

Another big point I want to touch upon after privacy is the whole issue of competence. The fact is the government's track record is one of absolute and utter incompetence when it comes to the administration of important programs: the millions spent on advertising contracts for little or no work; the grants and contributions debacle at HRDC; the over \$1 billion by 2004-05 spent to register rifles and shotguns, which will probably grow exponentially after that; the big brother database which it had to dismantle when it was accidentally discovered and thousands of Canadians wrote and phoned their members of Parliament and demanded that it be dismantled.

Supply

•(1655)

All of this serves to convince Canadians that this is not a government which is either capable or trustworthy enough to require each and every citizen to have a comprehensive ID card including biometric identifiers.

The fact is that Canadians are still seething about the gun registration fiasco. A citizen in my constituency phoned my office. He said he was a law abiding citizen and did not agree with the registry, but two years ago he went down to Southgate Mall, signed up the information, had the pictures taken and handed the information over. He said that two years later, in December of last year, he phoned to ask where his card was. He was told that there was no record of him. He said that he had put all his personal information on the form, his three firearms, his house and everything, including pictures of himself, and that someone had the information because he handed it over.

If the government is not competent enough to actually collect this information and store it in a database, protect it and ensure that it is secure, then the whole purpose of the database in the first place is destroyed. If the government lost it, or if someone else who had malicious intentions picked it up, that person would know where my constituent lives. They would know the firearms he has. They could break in and commit some sort of heinous crime with this information.

This situation with the firearms registry now is one that the justice minister is completely unwilling to address. He stands up and talks about public safety every day, as if wasting a billion dollars somehow improves our public safety, as if directing resources away from our police services somehow in some way protects our public safety.

I have mentioned just HRDC and the firearms registry, but we also know about the whole issue with the SIN cards. I had another constituent phone my office. She lost her SIN card and phoned HRDC to request another one. The government bureaucrat told her she was not allowed to have another one. She then phoned my office to check this information. We phoned HRDC and initially were told that this was correct, that she could not access a new ID card, that she actually would have to go into a witness protection program to access a new one. I asked, what if this person was using her information to obtain new cards? This is ridiculous. Somehow the policy changed and she now can obtain a new SIN card. However, just the whole fact that the government has lost control of so many SIN cards should certainly give us pause when we are considering something as fundamental as a new ID card for everyone.

I just want to touch upon some comments made by a University of Toronto information technology professor, Andrew Clement. He has studied the whole issue of national ID cards. He has warned us that such an offline system is not much use as a security tool since someone could obtain a card under another name with his own fingerprint or eye scan on the bar code. Even with a central database such a card would not be much of a deterrent for terrorists, in his view. Anyone would be able to obtain such a card by presenting other fraudulent documents such as birth certificates. The creation of a secure card depends on the presentation of much less secure documents.

I think that is important for us to keep in mind. That is why we on this side of the House and in this party oppose the introduction of a national identification card and why we support the motion presented by the NDP today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we have heard often that an identity card could contain fingerprints. However, even though a national identity card might contain fingerprints, we must remember that today with the right to privacy, should an individual be accused and his fingerprints sent to the RCMP, if he were to go to court and be found not guilty, his fingerprints should have to be returned to him. It is not something you give freely to just anybody.

In this case, some are already thinking that we could have an identity card with our fingerprints or a retinal scan that we could carry with us across the country and all over the world. Imagine the power that would give the government.

I find it odd that the Liberals are thinking about that today, because it does not mean they will be here forever, and one of these days they too will be on the street. Are they not here to protect citizens and not just to give more power to the state?

•(1700)

[*English*]

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, and he certainly raises the most fundamental point. If we have our most precious and our most intimate information on this card, that certainly gives a lot of power to the government. As someone who is very concerned about civil liberties, I am very concerned about government having that power.

His question also raises the other issue. What if somebody loses their card? There is that information. I have my retinal scan and my fingerprints on this card and I lose my card. There the system is not secure, because that will happen. People lose their SIN cards or credit cards all the time. What do we do once somebody has that information? I assume that it can be accessed through some sort of computer system. How is the system secure when that happens?

It does come down to the fundamental point: There is no reason why we should be giving these powers to the government at this time, or to any government. Regardless of political party, there is no reason why we ought to be giving any sort of government these types of powers.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I find it amazing today in this debate that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration would continually get up and say that this is just a debate, that we should not ask these questions, or that he would ask why we expect them to have answers about cost estimates and about what information is going to be on this card, should we choose to put this information on the card.

Supply

I would ask my colleague whether he would agree with me that the government should have answers to those questions, that the minister should have the answers, that his representative, the parliamentary secretary, should have answers on this very important topic, and that to come to the House without those specific proposals is in fact unbelievable. Would he agree with me?

Mr. James Rajotte: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I would agree 100% with my colleague and his wise words. I am just astounded at this. When government introduces something as fundamental, something that would change Canadian society to the extent that a national ID card would, one would think that government would have very substantive detailed answers to these questions. What is the purpose of the card? What will it be used for? What will it replace? How will it affect other cards that we have, like provincial health care cards and even Visa cards? Will there be a relationship between this card and other cards?

These are questions which, before something like this is introduced, I would think that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration would do well to sit down and consider. He should consider all the possibilities and all the questions and come up with substantive answers.

It just seems to me that there is this tendency with the government. Whether it is on this card or on Kyoto or even on Iraq, there does not seem to be a substantive and clear policy direction from beginning to end.

I would advise the government to take this recorded debate into consideration. The fact that fundamental answers cannot be given today should certainly give it pause in introducing such a card.

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the questioner earlier made a very cheap political statement by saying that we do not know the answers. There is a purpose for hearings. As far as I know, we send committees across the country to hear the people. If we are going to tell them what we want, what is the purpose of hearings?

It is the same thing here. We are having a hearing. We are having a discussion here. If we were going to tell everybody that this is what we want, then we would not have a discussion, we would have a bill. The idea is that there is no bill here. Nothing is being introduced. We are just having a discussion.

If he does not appreciate the fact that we are having a discussion, then he should say so.

• (1705)

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the fact that we are having a discussion. I would like to stand up in the House and thank the New Democratic Party for allowing us to have this discussion, because it certainly was not the government that sparked this discussion. It was an opposition party that stood and said that it was time for us to have a discussion and a debate on this matter.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know that the member for Edmonton Southwest is a student of libertarianism. I think he is an advocate of the famous writer Ayn Rand, whose treatise called *The Virtue of Selfishness* has become a sort of bible for the Canadian Alliance.

Would it offend his libertarian sensibilities if he were living in a country where he had to carry his national ID card even to go to the corner grocery store to buy a newspaper and if, under such a regime, a policeman could pull him over and ask him, demand in fact, for his ID card, demand that he produce his papers? Would he find that offensive, given the libertarian bent under which he dwells?

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague, but I have to correct him. I am not an admirer of Ayn Rand and I am not an admirer of her works. When I think of libertarian thought, I think of people like John Locke and others. I think we should read the classics. I am not one who considers Ayn Rand part of the classics.

I would certainly agree with his assessment and the tenor of his question, which is the fact that we should not want the type of society he asked about, a society where we have to produce an ID card just for simple transactions.

That goes to my fundamental point, which is that in my view most of the interactions between human beings in a society can be accomplished without government interference, and we should have as many as possible without government interference. Where it is necessary, it needs to be there, and government is necessary in a limited role. Where it is not necessary, let us not encourage it. Let us not, in a very sloppy and incompetent way, introduce a card which we do not even know the purpose of.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague about how members are talking about an identification card like, for example, a driver's licence. As we all know, driver's licences for many years were just little cards with our addresses on them. Just by putting our photographs on them, it meant that nobody else could use those permits. The identification shows that the permit belongs to us. The only information on the licence is the address information and a photograph.

However, for the national identification card we are talking about fingerprints and all kinds of information. We could lose that card and would be giving out information on our whole life, almost, to somebody else, and we surely do not want that to be used at any time. That is the worry that Canadians should have. That is what Canadians should be told to worry about and they should be told not to agree with this card.

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question. I do not know what I could say beyond what he has said, except for the fact that he is absolutely right. This goes far beyond any type of card that we already have. We can compare it to a driver's licence, in which case we walk into a registry and give a few simple facts about the colour of our eyes and how much we weigh. This goes far beyond that.

For the government to have access to this information and, as I said before, because of the fact that we could possibly lose this card and lose this information, I think that is a road that we do not want to go down in this country.

Supply

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is with some trepidation that I enter into the debate today. After listening to my colleagues and to some of the questions being asked, I would hope that at this stage in our democracy we would not be trying to give some type of personal ID with all sorts of biometrics on it to every Canadian citizen. Surely we have gone beyond that stage in democracy, because that is not democracy at all.

The first question Canadians should ask themselves is: who will manage the system? Will it be the same managers who are in power today? It has been said time and again that the cost of the gun registry would be \$2 million but it has been allowed to go to \$1 billion. Will it be the same people who cannot even manage the social insurance numbers in this country, a card that is carried by nearly every Canadian over 18 years of age. Let us look at their record. It is absolutely dismal.

HRDC's social insurance numbers were mentioned in the 1998 Auditor General's report and in October 2002 a news release stated:

The Auditor General is concerned that the identity and citizenship status of applicants were not checked adequately for the majority of SINs issued since 1998.

For five years the Liberals have not been able to keep track of their social insurance numbers and now they want to bring in a card that will contain all kinds of personal information that will track every Canadian. This is the same gang who could not even keep track of codfish and now they want to keep track of people.

This the same group that includes a minister of fisheries who would not allow us to put a black box on the 500 or 600 trawlers offshore. He said we could not do it because he could not keep track of them and yet this group wants to keep track of 33 million Canadians. I do not think so.

The Auditor General went on to say that in her view HRDC's current policies and practices did not meet the intent of the Employment Insurance Act and regulations because the department was not doing enough to properly identify applicants for social insurance numbers. That is just one piece of identification.

There is inadequate control over the 900 series social insurance numbers that are issued to people who are not Canadians or permanent residents. Although most of these people are expected to be in Canada temporarily, these SINs have no expiry date. The Liberals could not even put an expiry date on a social insurance number for a temporary resident, but now they want to have some type of brand on every man, woman and child in the country. They think they can manage that but they could not even manage a partial attempt at identification.

This gets better. There are still problems with the integrity of the information in the social insurance register. This particular group of government managers identified a problem in 1998, a huge problem for Canadians because there were all kinds of social insurance number frauds going on.

In 2002 there were still problems with the integrity of the information in the social insurance register. This is mind-boggling. For example, the number of usable social insurance numbers for people over 20 exceeds the actual population in that age group by five million. We are not talking 10,000, 50,000 or 500,000. We are talking about five million. There are five million more social

insurance cards out there than there are people in the age group for which they were issued. These things are worth money. We could open a bank account. We could check into some else's bank account. All kinds of information can be found through a social insurance number. If we had someone's social insurance number we could commit all kinds of identity fraud.

● (1710)

The same group that has allowed five million extra social insurance numbers out there, and has done nothing since 1998 to stop that rampant abuse, now wants to issue a national identity card. It would like Canadians to have a fingerprint or a retina check on the card, possibly their driver's licence, and all kinds of other personal information, such as medical records.

We have the abuse and theft of social insurance numbers, we have some 12,000 individual Canadians who have their personal identity stolen every year, and now we want to put all of that information into one card. What would it be worth to the criminal elements of this country? What would it be worth to people who buy and sell this type of information every day and use it for illegal purposes? It would be worth a lot of money. It would be worth more than social insurance numbers, SINs that the government cannot even keep track of.

There is no integrity of data in the social insurance system for social insurance numbers. There is no integrity of data in the gun registry. There is no integrity of data in anything that gang touches.

What would the Liberals call this card? Someone a minute ago jokingly called it the "maple leaf card" and that we would be able to get into the lounge at the airport. I think it is a little more serious than that.

I do not believe I am standing in this place having a debate on whether to brand Canadians like cattle. I do not think that is the answer. However I will say that just about any group in Canada has done a better job at keeping track of information than the government has. Somehow or another we have lost all common sense.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration wants a personal identity card and we have had thousands of IMM 1000s stolen, the refugee status cards. They are out there for sale on the open market. There is something drastically wrong here.

George Radwanski, who is supposedly protecting the privacy of Canadians, has stated:

Personal information is central to privacy-in fact, I define privacy as the right to control access to one's person and to information about oneself.

Surely it is the duty of parliamentarians to make sure that access to information on individual Canadians is severely restricted.

This is about management. Canadians need to ask themselves whether they want this gang to manage their personal information when it could not manage anything else. Let us be honest here. We can read all the polls we want. How many Canadians really trust that their information is secure? Who in this House does not know someone who has had their identity stolen? We would have a small circle of friends if we did not know someone who had their identity stolen. It is a terrible experience. It takes them years to clear their names.

• (1715)

If we want to do something to help Canadians, let us help the 12,000 per year who have their identities stolen, whose bank accounts are emptied, who have bills run up in their names, whose Visa cards are charged to the limit, whose driver's licences are stolen and who have insurance claims against them. They fight for years to clear their names. Let us help those people. Let us find a quick solution to that one. We should take a baby step because we are not ready to take a giant step like this.

People do not trust the Internet and they do not trust the government to handle information. Ekos Research Associates recently found that only 32% of daily users of the Internet, people who describe themselves as very comfortable with life online, are willing to register personal information on the Internet sites they visit. Among casual users the figure drops to 11%.

I can say that I do not mind shopping online but I will not give my credit card number online. I will give it over the telephone but I will not give it online. That is all there is to it.

If we were to take that a step further, those low comfort levels with privacy on the Internet translate into real consequences for electronic commerce because Ekos found that only 22% of Canadians were willing to give their credit card numbers online. Among confirmed Internet users, the figure rose to only 31%. Even among daily users of the Internet, it was still only slightly more than half.

What do we need a personal identity card for? We have several pieces of ID now. I am also not convinced that we should roll them all into one. I see no reason for that. There may be a few pieces of ID that could be rolled into one so more information is on one card. That might be a reasonable, responsible step. One would not expect that from this government, but it is a reasonable, responsible step.

If people travel outside the country they obtain and use a passport. If they travel inside the country they do not need a passport. Therefore we do not need a personal identity card that could become extremely valuable on the black market and that could contain more information than the majority of Canadians would want to give out.

If I am giving information to the motor vehicle branch in Nova Scotia, then it does not need to know the rest of my personal information. It absolutely does not need to know it. My medical information, my medical file, my allergies and all of that does not need to be on my driver's licence.

I cannot imagine how we have taken this leap of faith with a government that has not been able to manage any file it has touched. We have tens of billions of dollars in foundations that have been set up by this government and we cannot get access to information.

Supply

If the government wants personal information on individual Canadians, then it should open up the files on the foundations that it established and allow us access so we can look at them. It should open the files to the Auditor General so we know whether or not proper accounting practices are being used. It should open them up so we know who sits as chair and who sits as members on the board besides the minister of that particular department.

If we want to become an open, free and democratic society, there are all kinds of information out there to which I am sure my colleagues and I would like to have access.

The government should not tell us on one hand that there are over \$22 billion or \$23 billion in foundations, \$10 billion or \$12 billion in the last few years, but that it is not willing to give out any of that information. This is arm's length from politics, arm's length from access to information and arm's length from the Auditor General and proper accounting practices.

• (1720)

On the other hand, every detail of information about an individual Canadian is needed. I am surprised the Liberals have not started to burn books. That is generally the route that countries take. This is absolutely scandalous.

If the government is intent on this, then it should show us a reasonable, rational plan, for example, that it wants to take back all social insurance numbers because there are five million more social insurance numbers than there are Canadians. The government wants to take all of them back and issue a new card. It wants to include in that card one or two more items. Perhaps the government could issue some type of pharmacare card. I am sure that tomorrow the government will come up with a pharmacare plan for Canadians so they can actually afford to buy the drugs they need. I am certain that information could be piggy-backed from one government department to another.

I cannot imagine how the government will manage a system involving one single identity card for every individual Canadian. I said at the start of my speech that the government cannot keep track of cod fish which is very true. It cannot keep track of the rest of the fish stocks either. We proposed in the House and at committee a number of times that the government should keep track of fishing boats. There has never been any attempt to do that.

With the GPS equipment that is available today, with global positioning on every trawler offshore, we would know in a second where every fishing boat was. We would know where the foreign trawlers were. We would know if they were fishing in the wrong zone. We would know if they were mis-reporting. If the government wants to keep track of something it should be keeping track of that.

Private Members' Business

The government should tell NAFO that there should be positioning equipment on every foreign trawler fishing in Canadian water and on the high seas in the Canadian zones. That would be something important to keep track of. The government would know whether trawlers were fishing in 4X or 3Ps. The government would know whether they were on the Flemish Cap, the nose and tail of the Grand Banks or St. Pierre and Miquelon. The government would know where the boats were. If trawlers reported their catch from one area instead of another, the government would obviously know the fish were not caught there.

There are a couple of hundred trawlers that the government refuses to keep track of. However there are 33 million Canadians and the government wants to keep track of them. I do not understand this. I am trying to understand the rationale.

If Liberals want us to trust them, and Canadians surely will never do that again, then they should start a little slower. Take smaller steps. Fix the social insurance number fraud. Benefits are going to people who are dead and it is costing hundreds of millions of dollars. There are five million extra social insurance cards out there. The government should fix that problem, take care of it.

The government wants to keep track of things. If it wants to do something about Canada's standing in the world and protect the east coast and west coast fish stocks and keep track of information, then it should do it.

I am sure Canadians would support the government if it wanted to fix the gun registry. The government has not even begun to do that. It needs \$15 million immediately. What Canadians have not been told is that amount only helps the database for another three, four or five months and after that, it is back to square one and a wasted \$1 billion.

• (1725)

There are a number of areas in which the government could improve on the information gathering and improve on the value per dollar that Canadians are receiving for their tax dollars. Nothing will be improved by bringing in a national ID card.

Is there a way to improve our Canadian passport? Maybe there is. Convince me. Show me that something else is needed on the passport. I think most Canadians would consider that. However I do not see the reason for a national ID card. I think it is like gun control was in the beginning, it is smoke and mirrors to take the public's mind off the real issues of incompetence and poor management.

• (1730)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

ENDANGERED SPECIES SANCTUARIES ACT

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Canadian Alliance) moved that Bill C-232, an act respecting the creation of sanctuaries for endangered species of wildlife, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful to my colleague from Dewdney—Alouette for seconding Bill C-232, regarding the creation of sanctuaries to protect endangered species.

In our country there are some 20,000 species, 8,000 of which are endangered and are becoming extinct. Historically the debate on endangered species has been marred in a great deal of difficulty and has gone around in a big circle. We have not really improved the situation and the facts bear it out.

As time passes the endangered species situation is becoming worse and worse. The rate of extinction on our planet is 100 to 1,000 times the normal rate of extinction that existed in times past. In the world some 240 hectares of land are destroyed every single hour. This is due to urban sprawl, agriculture and essentially the destruction of habitat.

Bill C-232 fills a number of loopholes in the government's bill on the environment. I will explain what they are.

The first flaw in the government's bill was in actually deciding what animals and what habitat were endangered in the first place. Currently those political decisions reside in the lap of the minister. My bill puts them in the hands of the scientists. Scientists on the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada would make the decisions. They would decide which species and which land would be designated as being in danger of extinction. It would be based on scientific designations.

The second aspect is very important. Habitat destruction is the single most important contributing factor in the destruction of species on our planet. My bill obligates the government to work with the provinces and private landowners to ensure that an agreement is reached. Where no agreement is reached, the government has the power to expropriate the minimum amount of land of critical habitat. My bill obligates the government to reimburse the private landowner for the loss of income from that particular habitat.

Usually an agreement can be arrived at. Many wonderful and innovative agreements have been put together, particularly in Saskatchewan where incredible work has been done.

Failing an agreement, the protection of the critical habitat for that species which is becoming extinct is foremost in my bill. My bill obligates the government to protect that habitat at all costs for the protection of the species.

When we look at the larger picture of endangered species and the massive destruction of endangered species around the world, we see that there are a number of factors. As I said before, the destruction of habitat is the most important factor. Second is the international trade and trafficking in endangered species.

Our country unfortunately is one of the leading contributors to the trafficking in endangered species. It is the third leading illegal product traded in the world, behind weapons and drugs. It is mostly driven by organized crime gangs and terrorist groups that generate funds from this illegal trade. The impact is massive. It is a multibillion dollar trade.

It is sad to say that Canada is one of the major conduits in the entire world of this trade. It affects not only our species, such as bears and other large and small mammals, plants and butterflies, but also it affects international species, such as the big cats, rhinos, birds, and many others.

Poaching is another major problem. There are penalties for poaching in our country but sad to say, those penalties are not applied to the maximum. The act of poaching is often not considered as being such a significant problem. It is not considered to be a significant crime.

The individuals who commit the poaching often do it in a commercial fashion and are responsible for the deaths of hundreds if not thousands of endangered species. Oftentimes the penalties that the individuals receive do not even meet the profits that they receive from one shipment of endangered species.

There is little application of the law and little disincentive to make individuals stop poaching. They know full well that the courts will not apply the maximum penalties. I would encourage the government at least to apply minimum penalties for that type of activity.

● (1735)

Also, we have to look at the resources for our conservation officers. The government has gutted the ability of our conservation officers to defend our country's wild spaces. It has removed their resources, it has cut their numbers and it also has disarmed them. Disarming our conservation officers, as my colleagues from Alberta know very well, is a very bad thing. We find out a number of things in the bush. Rarely, as a last resort, we may need a rifle or a sidearm to protect ourselves from an aggressive animal. Also, we may have to protect ourselves from a far more dangerous creature, human beings. Poachers have guns. To have our conservation officers out there unarmed and vulnerable is something that the government must reverse very quickly, because it is putting our conservation officers' lives in danger, in my view.

CITES, the convention on the international trade in endangered species, is a wonderful piece of international legislation that works to protect endangered species. The sad part of it is that our country has not lived up to our fundamental obligations under this convention, even though we have signed it as the centrepiece of the international protection of endangered species.

We also have to close the major loophole called reservations. Reservations under CITES enable a country to say it is backing out of the convention because it feels it has a right to consume the most endangered species in the world, a unilateral decision. Japan, for example, has taken itself out of CITES for a number of the most endangered species, some whales and sea turtles. The Japanese consume them at great expense to the environment and the species. It is outrageous that more than 20,000 endangered sea turtles are killed every year just to meet the consumption market in Japan.

Private Members' Business

We have spoken about pollution many times. It is a major threat in our seas, in our oceans and on our land. If there is one thing the government can do, not only for the health of endangered species but for the health of humans, it is to deal with the pollution problems in our water, air and land. All are a contributing negative factor, not only for non-human species but also for humans. It has a massive impact upon the health of all of us.

Over-exploitation is another problem. I live in British Columbia. Over-exploitation of our fisheries on the west coast has had a devastating effect on salmonid species and others that live in our oceans. This was done as a miscalculation and through a lack of attention to what our fisheries officers have been telling the government for years. The government is not applying good scientific principles to the establishment of proper quotas for harvesting fish species in a sustainable fashion. It is not being done, at great expense to our communities in British Columbia and no doubt to those on the east coast too. The government needs to change that.

We also need to look at the notion of free trade. Free trade can in fact help our endangered species, and I will tell the House how: by reducing the subsidies on fisheries and agriculture. Right now in the world \$22 billion is spent on subsidies on fish. What that leads to is overharvesting of our fish species all over the world, leading to a downward pressure and the extinction of many fish species internationally.

What I would like to do now is articulate a new model for conservation, which I gave to the government some six years ago. I hope the government will take it up because it will serve as the missing link between conservation and development.

Historically, the conservationists and developmentalists have actually taken parallel paths that have often worked at odds with each other. We certainly saw that in Johannesburg at the post-Rio summit, the earth summit that took place last year. What has happened is that conservationists have ignored developmentalists at their expense, and people involved in development have ignored conservationists at their expense. The two have to be dealt with mutually, particularly in areas of the world where lack of conservation is decimating some of the most important international critical habitats. I am talking about the developing world.

● (1740)

In South Africa, that missing link has actually been found. I will explain how it happened. Through conservation, funds can be generated. Those funds have to be divided between conservation and primary development in rural areas for health, education and job creation. When people who live near a critical habitat derive an economic and personal benefit from that habitat, what they see is an incentive to preserve and protect that critical habitat. This is the crux of the matter. Unless human beings can actually derive a direct benefit from the conservation of a particular habitat and site, unless they derive that personal benefit, that area will be destroyed. It is happening all over the world.

Private Members' Business

However, if we can create a system whereby human beings, particularly those in these areas, can generate a financial benefit, it works. I will give some examples. In KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, they have done this very well. The people there actually said many years ago in the late 1800s that many critical species, such as the white rhino, were becoming extinct because of the decimation and destruction of their habitat. They said that they had to protect that area and they did, but they also recognized that the people around the area had to benefit from it because population pressures would be such that they would have overrun the area, regardless of what central governments chose to do. They did that with great success.

Right now the World Wildlife Fund recognizes that. Historically it has not. It took the historical conservationist approach, which is to say we must preserve this particular area for the sake of it being preserved, ignoring the human needs in the surrounding area. In so doing, it ignored the human needs at the peril of conserving that particular area.

I ask the government to do the following, and I say that it can actually do this. It can, through our official development and assistance programs, through CIDA, work not only with other countries but indeed with our own conservation groups here at home, bringing together the NGOs and provincial and federal governments to say that conservation sites must be there to generate funds which can and must benefit the surrounding people. Also, it will provide the opportunity to generate funds for our conservationists themselves, for our hard working conservation officers who have an acute lack of funding to help themselves.

One area that could do it but is controversial is the notion of trophy hunting. I myself am not a hunter, other than with a camera, and I cannot imagine killing anything. However, it is a fact that when there is an excess number of species too much pressure is applied on a habitat and the species themselves are harmed.

What can be done is to designate a certain number of those species to be hunted, with a very large sum of money being charged. Those monies, however, have to be poured into the conservation system for conservationists and for conservation in that area. If that is done, the monies are generated for research and development into conservation, indeed, for the protection of that particular area and for the expansion of other critical habitat.

We know, regardless of where we are in Canada and indeed abroad, that the lack of resources is one of the biggest obstacles to funding conservation projects. With central governments having large competing interests for health care, education and other needs, conservation is often dropped to the bottom of the list in terms of the expenditure priorities of a central government. This, however, cannot continue, or should I say this will continue but it can be reversed by giving our conservationists the tools to do the job. The tools to do the job can come if we are able to generate the funds from those areas.

In closing, I will say that untouched wild spaces are becoming extinct. Pressure on critical habitat is the single greatest cause of the destruction of these critical habitats. They will be lost forever. Is it a fait accompli? Absolutely not. My bill will be able to provide the government with the ability to close loopholes that will enable our

government and our country to protect our wild species and our endangered species forever. It will also show the world that there can be a working together among conservationists, the private sector, the federal government, the provincial governments and NGOs for the betterment of our society.

• (1745)

If we do not do this, we will continue to lose species and biodiversity, which will affect us in countless ways in the future, ways that we cannot hope to understand at this point in time, but ways that will no doubt affect us adversely forever.

Mr. Alan Tonks (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we in Canada have some incredible success stories to tell about protecting wildlife and the places in which we do this.

The Oak Hammock Marshes were recovered from farmland and are now home to thousands of birds and waterfowl in Manitoba. In Point Pelee, at the tip of southern Ontario, we have a sanctuary that draws unique species and provides them shelter and food on their migratory journeys. We have international ecosystems of significance declared under the Ramsar treaties.

We also have conservation covenants signed by farmers, woodlot owners, beachfront property owners and resource users. We have land trusts. We have green spaces. We have stewardship projects in every province and territory. All of these combine to set up a system that protects species where they live.

These are all sanctuaries for species. These are sanctuaries we can also save for the people of Canada because these and others like them protect the very essence of biodiversity that supports life on earth. There is something quite essential that these different successes have in common. They were formed through partnerships and they were formed through co-operation. Those partnerships and that co-operation would not have been possible without the way that the provinces, territories and the Government of Canada have worked together for many generations on the management of wildlife and habitat.

We have before us Bill C-232, an act on the creation of sanctuaries for endangered species of wildlife. While there is much merit to the spirit of the bill, and I compliment the mover, my colleague across the way, the Government of Canada cannot, however, support the bill for several basic reasons.

The proposed bill calls on the governor in council to designate as endangered species those that COSEWIC has concluded are at risk of extirpation or extinction. So far, I can agree. It is easy to agree since this is a basic element of legislation, the Species at Risk Act, which received royal assent in December, and captures that particular spirit.

Private Members' Business

However, Bill C-232 then says that the Minister of the Environment should make an agreement to establish a sanctuary with the owner, federal, provincial or private, of the land that COSEWIC has reported is necessary for the protection and recovery of the endangered species. If an agreement cannot be reached, expropriation or a restrictive covenant would be possible. Compensation or a transfer of federal land or an interest in federal lands is possible.

[Translation]

This proposed policy does not provide for the kind of federal, provincial and territorial cooperation with regard to wildlife management that has been going on for years.

As a matter of fact, I would even say that the cooperation and partnership could be seriously jeopardized if such an approach were to be taken.

[English]

The reason is that there would end up being a disincentive to protecting species at risk and habitat on private lands. The voluntary approach which has been so successful would not work nearly as well, if at all.

This is not necessary. It adds another layer of complexity that we do not need. We have wildlife sanctuaries already. Under the Migratory Birds Convention Act and the Canada Wildlife Act, the Minister of the Environment can create wildlife sanctuaries for endangered species to enable them to recover their populations.

I should point out that the regulations under the Migratory Birds Convention Act ensure the migratory bird populations are conserved by addressing potential harmful human activities. Under the Oceans Act, there can be habitat protection for species in marine environments. The National Parks Act provides a tool for protecting species and other elements of our national heritage.

We should also remember that under the Canada Wildlife Act there is also creation, management and protection of national wildlife areas for wildlife research activities, or for conservation or interpretation of wildlife. National wildlife areas are designed to preserve habitats that are critical to migratory birds and other wildlife species, particularly those that are endangered. Regulations for these areas prohibit all activities that could be harmful to species and to their habitat unless a permit is issued indicating the permitted activity.

As members can see, it is not as if nothing has been done. In fact, Environment Canada now manages 92 migratory bird sanctuaries and 50 national wildlife areas which encompass over 11.6 million hectares across Canada. We do not need legislation that tells us to make new ones for endangered species. We have many ways of doing that already.

Look at the Species at Risk Act. Under this act, there is a provision for a listing system based upon COSEWIC's assessments and prohibitions against killing or harming a listed extirpated, endangered or threatened species and the destruction of their residences and critical habitat. The Species at Risk Act also provides for a comprehensive process for planning and implementing recovering actions for listed species.

•(1750)

[Translation]

Protected areas, national wildlife areas, Ramsar sites and migratory bird areas are all sanctuaries. Sanctuary status is given to areas that are an important habitat for migratory birds. These sanctuaries help protect birds from hunting and any other disturbance. They allow populations of endangered migratory birds to recover.

[English]

We do not want to put into place another law that will make this more confusing. We need to put more action on the ground, not in regulations and laws that duplicate what we already have done. We certainly do not need to add another legislative requirement to make things more complex.

What we need to do is fulfill our obligations on what is already in place. We need to build on our partnerships with provinces and territories. We need to build on what we have done with ordinary citizens, politicians, organizations, businesses, industries, school children and with Canada's aboriginal peoples. We need to use what we have, with the partners who have helped us to get where we are and who will continue to help us into the future. That way we will have the ultimate success and ensure sanctuary, not just now but for generations to come.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to take part in this debate in Bill C-232, put forward by my hon. colleague from the Canadian Alliance, whom I commend on this initiative.

It is difficult for me, however, to support it formally. I am not rejecting out of hand the concept of sanctuaries as set out in this bill, but it seems important to me to remind this House that, back in 1989, Quebec passed legislation respecting threatened or vulnerable species. Quebec also passed legislation respecting the conservation of wildlife. In addition, it made fishing regulations, specifically to achieve greater protection for species.

Moreover, in 1996, acting on its willingness to comply with the convention on biological diversity, Quebec put in place an implementation strategy with respect to the convention. Quebec also introduced its own protected area strategy. Under this strategy, 17 types of sites can be legally designated in order to ensure the protection of protected areas, including sanctuaries.

Quebec's position has always been the following: we ask that Quebec legislation be respected; we believe that federal legislation that would duplicate existing Quebec legislation in certain areas is unacceptable. This has been our historical position since 1989.

In Quebec, protected areas are the building blocks of the conservation of biological diversity. In its strategy, Quebec developed the following definition:

What is a protected area? A protected area is defined as "an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means".

Private Members' Business

That is the definition found in the Quebec strategy for protected areas. This definition is designed to ensure the conservation of species, and their genetic variability in particular.

Under this strategy, there are more than 1,100 sites in Quebec that have been designated in accordance with the legislation respecting protected areas. There are 17 different judicial designations to protect species and their habitat.

Understandably, with respect to conservation, the protection of vulnerable or threatened species cannot and can never be ensured if their habitat is not appropriately protected. This is the very purpose of the Quebec legislation respecting protected areas.

Included in these 17 designations are wildlife habitats, protected marine areas, protected natural areas, national parks and historic sites, urban regional parks and migratory bird sanctuaries. Not under federal legislation, but under Quebec legislation. There are also ecological reserves and sites protected under the charter of private organizations.

• (1755)

I forgot, but I must stress that Quebec's legislation on protected areas includes wildlife sanctuaries, as presented in the federal act.

So, what will this federal legislation do? It will only duplicate what Quebec is already doing. As the parliamentary secretary indicated, it would put an end to seamless and desirable collaboration between the provinces and the federal government.

Unfortunately, with this bill, the federal government will pass legislation on wildlife sanctuaries, as it did with Bill C-5 on species at risk.

Our difficulty in supporting, not the notion of wildlife sanctuaries but the goal of this legislation, is therefore understandable.

Furthermore, I would remind the House that, in June 2000, Quebec adopted strategic principles and guidelines to create a protected area network across Quebec. Our objective was for 8% of the total area to be designated a protected area by 2005.

Of course, such an area does not have to be a wildlife sanctuary. I believe that these areas must be given appropriate designations. However, the objective is clear. By 2005, 8% of Quebec must be designated a protected area.

I can only disagree, especially with subsection 6(1) of my colleague's bill, which reads as follows:

Where COSEWIC has made a report to the Minister that a sanctuary is necessary for the protection and recovery of an endangered species and that land specified by COSEWIC would be suitable habitat for the endangered species and the lands is provincial Crown land, the Minister may make an agreement with the province holding title to the land, to establish a sanctuary on the land for the purpose of affording the species sufficient habitat in Canada to recover.

He adds, at subsection 6(2), and that is where I take issue:

In a case where the Minister is not able to reach an agreement for the purposes of subsection (1), the Governor in Council may, on the recommendation of the Minister, declare the establishment of a sanctuary on the land in question to be essential for the endangered species to recover and to be a work for the general benefit of Canada and order that the land or an interest in the land be expropriated or a restrictive covenant placed on the land for the purpose of establishing a sanctuary.

Therefore, with this bill, the federal government could designate land in Quebec a federal wildlife sanctuary, while Quebec already has its own system and its own protected area strategy.

We can only disagree with a bill that goes against a Quebec government decision made a few years ago not to sign the environmental harmonization agreement. Why did Quebec refuse to sign this agreement? Because it was felt that federal legislation would completely encroach on and overlap Quebec legislation.

Although the preferred approach here and the desire to create wildlife sanctuaries in Canada is commendable—I do not reject the principle or the notion of wildlife sanctuaries—I believe there should be more flexibility and greater cooperation with the federal government because that is what we need to truly protect the different species. But to achieve true protection, we must first protect the habitat.

• (1800)

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first I wish to thank my colleague, the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca who lives in one of the most beautiful areas in the country, after Nova Scotia of course. I also want to thank the hon. member and his staff for putting together what I think is a well thought out and considered bill. His intentions are honourable and the principles are required.

It is rather ironic to hear the government say that it does not need this bill and that everything is fine. It is living the life of Riley and everything will be just fine. It says that the legislation, the people, the resources and money are in place. Therefore we do not have to worry about the species that share this planet and country with us. The Liberal government feels it has everything under control. What nonsense. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Just off the coast of Nova Scotia, cod, salmon, sharks, skate and a number of other aquatic species are near the door of extinction. Yet we hear the Liberals say that it is all right, that they have it under control and we should not to worry. This is a government that cut environmental budgets year after year. This is a government that looks at COSEWIC like an enemy instead of a friend.

My colleague from the Bloc says that his members cannot support it because it may intrude into provincial jurisdiction. Species at risk do not understand provincial jurisdiction, especially migratory species that go from one border to the other. They do not care what politicians think or do. The fact is they need a resting place. They need a place to breed. They need a place to grow. They need a place to thrive. I support this bill wholeheartedly.

If there are things in the bill that the government or other opposition members cannot agree with, then make the bill votable. Bring it to committee, open up debate with Canadians, tweak it, change it, amend it, do whatever it takes to make it more palatable and acceptable to everyone. When a bill like this is not votable, it is frustrating. I have had similar bills that were not votable and it made me think it was a waste of time. The hon. member is absolutely correct in bringing this type of issue to the forefront.

Private Members' Business

We need to leave something for our children's children. We need to know that our grandchildren will also enjoy the species that we enjoy today. We can only do that if we have habitat for these species to survive. Whether it be a little plant in Quebec, a tree in B.C. or an animal somewhere in the prairies, it does not matter. We need to preserve the integrity of these species for future generations. I believe this bill would address a lot of those concerns.

One aspect which has been overlooked so far is the co-operation of our aboriginal people. The historical knowledge that aboriginal people can bring to the table in this type of discussion is amazing. We are talking about people who have lived off the land for thousands and thousands of years. They have seen the changes in our climate. They have seen the changes in migratory species. They have seen the effects and change of what industrialization or pollution can do to their lands. We need to incorporate them into these discussions. I know the hon. member would not have a problem with that.

What is most important is to make this type of bill votable so the concerns addressed by the parliamentary secretary can be further discussed in committee, where it should be. One just does not outright slam it and say it is no good, that we have everything under control. That is not a debate.

A debate is when people come to the table with open minds, reflect the opinions and thoughts of other people, take them into consideration and move it along to try to reach a possible compromise. It is quite sad and unfortunate when we debate this at 5:30 p.m. in the House of Commons and our minds are made up already.

The government always brings pieces of legislation to the forefront. We pick it apart and try to make it better because it is our right to do that. When the opposition brings something to the forefront which we think is a good idea and has merit or possibilities, we are encouraging the government to look at it to see if we can incorporate or improve the current legislation on the books now. One just does not come in here and flatten it like a fly on the wall.

•(1805)

This type of thing frustrates opposition politicians, as well as backbench politicians, when they come up with an idea like this, especially when it comes to our environment.

The hon. member is absolutely correct. If we do not do something of this nature, what are we telling our children? What are we telling the pages in this room who will be the leaders of tomorrow? What are we telling Canadians? That when it comes to endangered species, we will just talk about it but will not have a plan of action. Because right now the government legislation that is there is simply not working.

I will give an example. There is a beautiful area just outside my riding called the Liscombe Game Sanctuary. When I first moved to Nova Scotia, I thought it was a wilderness area protected from hunting or industrialization so that animals and species of all kinds could live there free of harassment. Lo and behold, when I got there, they were logging it and now almost 65% of the Liscombe Game Sanctuary has been logged. When we talk to the Department of Natural Resources people in the province, they say that they are responsible for the animals not their habitat.

If that is the kind of attitude and flippant remark of one official in Nova Scotia, imagine what is like across the country when it comes to dealing with pollution, global warming and with the lack of co-ordination.

The World Wildlife Fund campaigned years ago to protect 12% of lands across Canada, from the Yukon to Newfoundland, from Victoria to Halifax. The idea was to have a connected corridor north and south, east and west so animals that required large amounts of territories, like wolves, grizzly bears, et cetera would have connected resting areas where they could survive and where they could thrive. That was years ago and we still have not got there yet.

A large percentage of this country still is not protected. Look at our parks. They are under threat. Look at the fact that there is a lack of funding for parks. Hopefully in the next budget we will see something in that regard. However that is just one aspect of it.

Ecological integrity is the a crucial element. We need that to protect endangered species. If we have that, then quite possibly we will leave something behind.

Bill C-232 is a great start in that regard. The hon. member should be congratulated, not condemned, for bringing this to the House. I know nobody condemned him personally but they sure condemned his bill by basically saying no. In all respect I do not think the hon. member from the Bloc or from the Liberal Party actually read it. The Liberal Party generally comes in with some sort of bureaucratic format and the members just read from it. We see that all the time. However, if they had listened to what the hon. member said, then quite possibly they would have understood what he was trying to achieve.

I know the hon. member appreciates some of the concerns. He is on the government side and may have to toe the government line. That is the problem and it frustrates me. When speaking to private members' bills, people on the government side should speak as private members not as government members. They should speak from the heart, understand the debate and understand what the member is trying to achieve. Not only would we improve the debate and the decorum in the House, but I think we could improve and move things along.

We are all going to be gone from here one day. When our grandchildren or our nieces or nephews ask us what we did in the House of Commons, I hope members would like to be able to point to one thing and say that they were proud to have achieved this or that.

I know the hon. member would like to put his stamp on Bill C-232. He has my full support in trying to move this type of legislation forward so we can protect endangered spaces and endangered species for now and in the future.

Private Members' Business

• (1810)

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, the last member asked what we would tell our children when they asked us what we did when we were here. I will tell a story that I know I will be very proud of when I am done. I deals with an island, which is exactly what this bill is about. On one hand, I think the government should support the bill. On the other hand, the government did a really good thing in my riding.

There is an island in the Bay of Fundy which is 2.5 kilometres long and about one kilometre wide. It is about 10 kilometres offshore and when the mist rises out of the Bay of Fundy it is absolutely majestic. It is totally pristine. It is the way it was 10,000 years ago. This beautiful island has cliffs 300 feet high. Seals, birds, whales and porpoise are all around it. There are all kinds of stories about this island's past such as natives having used it for ceremonial purposes.

There was a story in the Canadian geographic magazine a few years ago stating that this island was up for sale. The island belonged to the Government of Canada and its only use was as a base for a lighthouse. The lighthouse burned down in 1957 and since then it has been a platform for a light. The coast guard owned this island but it then was transferred to fisheries when the coast guard left. I could not believe the island suddenly came up for sale but the coast guard deemed it surplus.

I approached the Minister of the Environment and we had several long discussions about it. At one point he flew down to see this island. He shared my opinion that it was absolutely an incredibly majestic island. On the southeast side of the island is a high cliff shaped like an amphitheatre. It is absolutely vertical. When the birds fly and chirp, the noise is so loud that it almost too hard to take. Meanwhile, seals pop up everywhere and wonder what is going on. I go to this island every year. Nobody lives on it. It is totally pristine.

The Minister of the Environment agreed to designate it as a wilderness preserve. Ownership had to first be transferred to the Department of the Environment, and I believe that transfer is underway now. The last stage will be to designate as a wilderness preserve.

• (1815)

In the future when one of my kids asks me what I did when I was here, this will be the one issue of which I will be most proud. This would not have happened though had the land not belonged to the Government of Canada. Had it not been deemed surplus, it could not have been transferred. If it had been a privately owned island, this never would have happened. Because it belonged to the Government of Canada, it was turned into a wilderness preserve.

My point on this little sales pitch about the Isle Haute is that this is an example of how important this type of exercise is. Part of the reason is because there are endangered species on this island. There are only 10 nesting places for the peregrine falcon in all the maritime provinces and this island is one of them. Several endangered species of rodents are also on the island as well as a lot of endangered flora

and fauna. That is part of the reason why there was the total support to convert this to a wilderness preserve.

Both the minister and the parliamentary secretary worked actively on this file, and I am grateful to them for their attitude and their co-operation. I look forward to the day when we can actually announce that it is a wilderness preserve, and I hope that day is not too far away.

I share the member's feeling about the issue of protecting habitat for wildlife. The island is being protected because it is the habitat of endangered species. However it is so much more than that. It is a treasure. Without that habitat, it probably would not have been saved. It would have probably gone to the highest bidder in the United States, or Germany or somewhere else and would have been restricted probably forever from the people in the area, for tourists or whoever wanted to see a part of Nova Scotia which remained untouched. It is absolutely pristine and perfect.

I compliment the member for moving the motion. If it were votable, we would be voting yes. It has a few little things in it we would like to adjust, but as the last speaker said, we could tweak it around. The bill could go to committee where we could debate it and make a few changes to it. Perhaps it would allow a whole lot of projects like Isle Haute to happen across the country and so much treasured habitat and special property and lands would be saved.

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I thank all members for contributing to this debate. I want to particularly thank my friends from the Progressive Conservative Party and the NDP for their comments.

• (1820)

At the end of the day this is about preserving endangered species that know no bounds, as my friend from the NDP said. Whether they are peregrine falcons, other types of birds, large and small mammals or even plants, they do not recognize or understand human, man-made boundaries.

Our country has a Gordian knot of jurisdictional problems that prevent critical habitat from being protected. Bill C-232 would undo that Gordian knot and enable us to do the right thing, to protect endangered species in Canada forever.

My friend from the Progressive Conservative Party illustrated the example of Isle Haute. Isle Haute demonstrates what the government can do and it did a good thing in that case. It was able to preserve that piece of land because it was under federal jurisdiction. Most land in our country where critical habitat needs to be preserved is not; it is in the jurisdiction of a combination of players, including the provinces and private landowners.

That is the point I am trying to make and it is the nub of the bill. The bill says that what should go beyond jurisdictional problems is the protection not just of any habitat but of critical, specific habitat for the preservation of critically endangered species.

Adjournment Debate

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

My friend from the government mentioned about the minister preserving pieces of critical habitat. I do not think the minister should have sole jurisdiction for doing that. Ministers come and go. Governments come and go, but critical habitat remains with us. The designation of critical habitat cannot be at the whim of any government or any political party. It must be designated on the basis of pure scientific fact.

This is a critical problem. Some 7,000 to 8,000 species are at risk in Canada today. Those numbers are increasing geometrically as time passes. The single greatest cause is the loss of critical habitat.

As I mentioned before, a nexus of good must come out of this, a nexus of cooperation involving conservationists, developmentalists and government. They can and must work together because historically they have not. Developers have been focusing on economic issues. Policy makers and governments have been dealing with how to contain growth. Conservationists have focused on the costs and consequences of growth on nature and the environment.

What we have seen has not really been a debate but three different groups working, living and pursuing what should be common goals but in three separate silos. The loser is our habitat and our future. In sum, the public agenda that we have cannot be surrendered entirely to public institutions. Conservation opportunities cannot be constrained by the interstate system. Global civil societies can contribute more to the sustainable future if they come together in a more organized way.

The bill was not made votable. We are the only country in the world that allows its elected members to put forth bills but decides to make them non-votable and completely useless. Therefore, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to make Bill C-232 votable so that it can go to committee and get the intelligent assessment and analysis that would enable all of us across party lines to assess this bill, tear it apart and make it better for the benefit of all Canadians.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca have the consent of the House to make the bill votable?

• (1825)

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired. As the motion has not been designated as a votable item, the order is dropped from the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House deemed to have been moved.

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, last Friday I rose in the House to question the Minister of the Environment about the serious issue of red tagging a herd of northern Caribou in the Itcha Ilgachuz Mountains in the western part of my riding.

Healthy growing herds of these caribou have been lumped in with an appropriately red tagged mountain caribou herd in the eastern part of my riding near the Wells Grey Provincial Park. There is over 500 kilometres and the mighty Fraser River separating these two regions and there is no cross-migration between these two areas and these two separate species of caribou.

The issue is not the health of these northern caribou in the Itcha Ilgachuz Mountains, but the size of the ecoprovince established by the federal government that includes viable herds with endangered herds, thus creating two separate problems.

The first problem is that the planned transfer of caribou from the Itcha Ilgachuz Mountains to establish and support small herds in the east Kootenays is stopped. The second problem is that with this red tagging, guides and outfitters are having to consider refunding deposits from clients who are already booked for hunting expeditions this fall because this herd has been red tagged since the bookings were made.

In October 2002 a letter from the British Columbia department of water, land and air signed by Nancy Wilkins was sent to Environment Canada to the attention of Karen Brown, requesting that the Itcha Ilgachuz northern caribou be excluded from this red tag listing. I am told by B.C. department officials that despite repeated requests, this letter has not yet been answered.

The federal government has ruled that the Itcha Ilgachuz herd cannot be hunted this year, even though it is healthy and growing. The hunt for next year is also doubtful. This will have dire social and cultural impact on the region. A constituent of mine who wrote to the Minister of the Environment and copied to me about this problem points out the situation quite well:

Some of the operations have been in existence for 50 years and these people have been the ones who have looked after the caribou population to ensure that their clients would have successful hunting opportunities. Some of their clients have made reservations for their next outdoor opportunity many years in advance. The guides who have territories in that area now have to refund all that money.

This is no small consideration, particularly in an area that is suffering from double digit unemployment. Numerous hunting associations have written to the minister about this situation without a reply to date. Years of work by local wildlife biologists have identified that there is a difference between the herds. The federal government says that an exemption has to be applied for, but with respect, that exemption has been applied for and there has been no response.

Adjournment Debate

I would like an answer to the following questions: Why has the letter from the government of B.C. requesting exemption not been answered? Why is the healthy western blue tag herd of caribou being lumped in with the red tag herd and classified in the southern ecoprovince and listed as a threatened species by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada when the classification of the blue tag explicitly says in the B.C. list status the following:

Blue tag: Includes any indigenous species or subspecies considered to be of special concern in British Columbia... but are not extirpated, endangered or threatened.

Mr. Alan Tonks (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Cariboo—Chilcotin, for raising this issue in the House. To answer the two questions, I think it would be instructive for the House to know what the species at risk legislation is, or more important, how it will be implemented.

I would emphasize that the species at risk legislation calls for a stewardship model that is a progressive relationship between the provincial, territorial and federal governments to protect species that are endangered. The act is triggered when a species is identified. In order to be totally objective with respect to an action that is taken, it is incumbent on the parties to the act, the provinces, the territorial governments and the federal government, to take the advice from an arm's length group called the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, COSEWIC. The arm's length relationship looks at the science of the issue and advises whether the species should be protected.

In this case, the member is absolutely correct. The mountain caribou herd has been suggested as being endangered and it is the intention of the federal government to act with respect to its authorities under the legislation.

However, it is the federal government that acts only in the last instance as a safety net where the rehabilitation or recovery plan that is provided by the province or the territorial government is either not followed up or is insufficient in the minds of COSEWIC and the federal government as being in keeping with protecting the species. Inasmuch as we are breaking new ground, it is instructive not only for me but I hope for the House to understand how the act will be implemented.

• (1830)

With respect to the two issues that have been raised, first as to why there is no answer, I have given every assurance to my colleague that in fact as to the request from the province with respect to an exemption, that correspondence will be answered and answered forthwith. With respect to why part of the herd is blue tagged and the other is red tagged, as I indicated, we have an arm's length relationship with COSEWIC, which looks at the science and makes the recommendation. It is only on that basis that in this case the mountain caribou herd has been red tagged.

I do, however, appreciate the concerns that have been expressed by the member, and we will be continuing to follow up on this matter.

Mr. Philip Mayfield: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the parliamentary secretary. It is paradoxical that the stewardship model that he refers to is exactly what has been followed for these northern caribou in the western Itcha Ilgachuz Mountains.

It is interesting that while I asked the minister to seriously consider and to grant the request of British Columbia, this is a growing and healthy herd of caribou. It is estimated to be between 2,800 and 3,400 strong in 15 separate herds.

It also is interesting that disease is not the problem in these animals, but the natural predator is wolves. I have been there and have seen how cutting patterns for forestry have been modified to provide protection for the caribou while they are feeding so that they are not obvious either to hunters or to wolves while they are feeding. It is also interesting that in the stewardship pattern, while the roads are open for logging, as soon as the logging is completed the roads are closed so one can only go in by foot or by horseback.

I do request the minister's serious concern and I thank the parliamentary secretary for his intervention.

Mr. Alan Tonks: Mr. Speaker, there is just one additional point that I did want to stress. Under the accord for the protection of the species at risk in Canada, the responsibilities obviously are a partnership in that the best available science should be applied.

The member has indicated some of the exceptions with respect to the herd that separate it from the broader herd. I simply would emphasize that while the matter is still with the province, and the trigger has not been pulled to where the federal jurisdiction clicks in, we continue to work with the provincial government and bring all of the encouragement we have to bear in order to get a positive resolution of the issue.

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise tonight to try to have some form of discussion with the parliamentary secretary.

• (1835)

After 10 years in this House, I am always a little disappointed to see that, even though we are all trying to make things better for our fellow citizens, when we ask questions, this place looks more and more like a stage where everyone is trying to steal the show without making any effort to respond to the issues raised in our questions.

I am particularly interested in the softwood lumber issue. I believe that the government, which had known for a very long time that the softwood lumber agreement would expire on March 31, 2002, did nothing to ensure that the free trade agreement with the United States would be honoured.

As a result, the United States imposed a 27% tax, which is hurting us and especially those who work in the industry.

Adjournment Debate

We, in the Bloc Québécois, have decided to travel to the main regions of Quebec to see with our own eyes the problems facing these people. We have to acknowledge once and for all that some industries are seasonal in nature. There is nothing they can do about it. And every year, workers in these industries go through some tough times because of their seasonal jobs.

A reform of the employment insurance program was carried out. Just last week, the minister was telling me “Employment insurance was reformed. Now, every hour counts, and so on and so forth”. There is one thing she seems to be forgetting and that is the infamous divisor rule determining the number of work weeks required. Not only the hours, but the work weeks also count.

We have people working for a while and then becoming unemployed every year, at about the same period of time. The number of benefit weeks they are entitled to depends on the number of hours they have worked. But then they also encounter what we call the gap, which is the 5 to 10-week period when they have absolutely no income.

What we need to do is to recognize the problems linked to this gap and seasonal work and then we might find a solution so that these workers do not have to face the same situation year after year.

By making changes to the EI boundaries, we ended up encouraging fraud. For instance, village X and village Y may be on opposite sides of the EI boundary. On one side, the limit is set at 420 hours and on the other, it is 565 hours. So, a worker may be tempted to use an address from the village where 420 hours are required because he or she works for the same employer.

A reform was carried out, but now we need to reform the reform. That is what the government would do if it were serious and really cared about the interests of the people.

Ms. Diane St-Jacques (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis for her question, which provides me with the opportunity to reiterate that the government is concerned with what happens to workers.

This is why it has promised in excess of \$246 million in support in order to help communities, companies and workers affected by the softwood lumber dispute. This will, of course, be over and above the employment insurance benefits of \$450 million paid yearly to unemployed forest industry workers.

The announced measures guarantee that the workers will have the skills they require to find and retain employment, whether it be in a revamped softwood lumber industry or some other sector of the economy.

These initiatives take into consideration the fact that workers in regions with high levels of unemployment run into unique obstacles when trying to get back into the work force.

Regions where the unemployment is at least 10% will be eligible for these programs. By directing the assistance measures available under the EI program to regions of high unemployment, the government is ensuring that help gets to the workers and communities that need it most.

These initiatives are over and above the measures already in effect under the employment insurance program, which makes available to laid off workers employment benefits and access to active employment measures. The EI program is in place to help people when they need help, including those who are at risk of losing their jobs, or have already been laid off, because of the softwood lumber dispute.

What is more, we are also investing \$2 billion, \$600 million of that in Quebec, to help Canadians find and retain jobs. This amount will enable the provincial government to provide targeted wage subsidies and to support self-employment and skills upgrading.

Employment insurance is not, however, the only solution for seasonal workers.

The creation of new jobs is the true solution to unemployment, and we continue to work in conjunction with key stakeholders in looking at ways of opening up more opportunities.

As for the pilot project for older workers, we are making available more than \$11 million in order to test innovative approaches to helping older workers in Quebec find and keep employment.

We are here for Canadians and we will continue to be here for them.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, I am almost tempted to say, “This has been a paid message brought to you by the Department of Natural Resources”.

● (1840)

It is ridiculous to respond like this to a very serious problem. We are constantly being told that the government has invested \$240 million for softwood lumber workers. That is not true. They invested \$40 million for the bug problem in British Columbia. They invested \$20 million for a research centre in Trois-Rivières, and they invested the rest to help workers across the country experiencing employment problems, not just in the softwood lumber industry, but any workers who were unemployed.

It is wrong to say that there is a specially designed program for softwood lumber workers. It is completely false. We have been out there, we have been to these places. We did not see any money. I would like the people of Baie-Trinité to hear what the member for Shefford is saying. I would like them to hear her little speech. They lost their jobs one year ago thanks to the negligence of this government, which has done nothing to solve the softwood lumber problem.

Now, she is telling us that they have something to help them. That is not true. There is nothing to help the workers of Baie-Trinité. Soon they will be on social assistance because their employment insurance is drying up. The mill has nothing in terms of new work.

This cannot really be considered a program designed for people suffering as a result of the softwood lumber dispute between Canada and the United States.

Adjournment Debate

Ms. Diane St-Jacques: Mr. Speaker, I would respond to the member for Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis by telling her that her statements are false. I repeat once again that the Government of Canada is concerned about the fate of these workers.

She is fully aware that we have invested \$246 million to assist workers affected by this dispute. There is also \$450 million in employment insurance benefits that are paid out to forestry workers. Another \$600 million is paid to Quebec under a labour market development agreement that establishes active measures to help people find and keep a job.

The federal government has provided more than \$2 million in contributions to the province of Quebec for innovation projects in the Lower Saint Lawrence, North Shore, Charlevoix and Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean regions.

Furthermore, in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, for example, we invested more than \$1 million to extend the tourist season. This allowed more than 120 workers to extend their employment.

I would like to assure the House that the federal government will continue to work with all stakeholders to come up with solutions to these employment problems.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 6:45 p.m.)

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