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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, April 30, 2003

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 30, 2003

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

● (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sing O Canada, and we will be led by the hon. member for Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore.

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

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

CANADIAN IMPROV GAMES

Hon. Jim Peterson (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 13, at Ottawa's National Arts Centre, the winner of the Canadian Improv Games was declared.

This 26th annual championship was contested by 20 high school teams from right across Canada, from St. John's to Victoria.

I salute each one of these teams and the parents, teachers, volunteer coaches and others whose support and generosity made possible this uniquely rewarding experience for so many young Canadians.

They gained self-esteem, life skills, the thrill of teamwork and many new friendships.

I especially salute the winners. They are from Willowdale. Their school is named after a leader who had an enormous impact on both the Catholic church and our community at large. Just a few weeks ago I attended the funeral to honour this great Canadian.

I congratulate Canada's 2003 Improv Games winner, Cardinal Carter Academy for the Arts. What a great achievement.

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CANADIAN EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COLLEGE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, May 4 to May 10 has, thanks to this government's handling of SARS, been renamed emergency unpreparedness week.

This year's theme is "Unprepared Now, Never Learn How". This is with the knowledge that the federal government did not learn any of the lessons from 9/11 when it comes to emergency preparedness.

A more thematic approach is promised, one that will focus on a minister of emergency preparedness who hides at the first sign of an emergency.

Of special interest to the Minister of Canadian Heritage should be Thursday, May 8, mitigation day, for the next time she speaks to the Minister of Health and her caucus colleagues.

Friday, May 9 will be dedicated to explaining why the biological team was moved from Arnprior to an unfinished Ottawa office on April 1 when the federal government should have been providing the World Health Organization timely information about SARS.

The decision to close the Canadian Emergency Preparedness College in Arnprior is an absolutely unnatural disaster.

Being unprepared for SARS should serve as a wake-up call to forget playing politics when people's lives are at risk.

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● (1405)

CADET PROGRAM

Mr. John Maloney (Erie—Lincoln, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's cadet programs, the Army, Navy and Air Cadet Corps, are community based initiatives for youth who are offered interesting and challenging activities, teach valuable life skills and teamwork, and provide unique opportunities to travel across Canada and around the world.

I commend the Government of Canada and the Minister of National Defence in their support of this program.

Recently it has come to my attention that the cadet program in my riding of Erie—Lincoln is in dire need of increased funding. Several of its projects have either been dismantled or downsized. I understand that this is a chronic problem throughout Canada.

My constituents of Erie—Lincoln support the cadet program as an excellent opportunity for youths and believe it creates many benefits for Canada and Canadians. The importance of cultivating leadership among youth from a military perspective cannot be underestimated.

I urge the Minister of Finance and the Government of Canada to provide additional funding and to take advantage of this opportunity to invest in the bright futures of our youth.

S. O. 31

CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

Mr. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of attending a ceremony held last week by the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews.

Good Servant medals were awarded to three impressive Ottawa teenagers: Tara Ogaick, Michelle Divon and Lana Ayoub.

As the daughters of an ambassador from Jordan, an ambassador from Israel and a former diplomat in Saudi Arabia, these three young Ashbury College students embarked on a diplomatic mission of their own in the halls and auditoriums of Ottawa high schools.

By sharing their remarkable life stories with other students, Lana, Michelle and Tara promote dialogue and better understanding of different cultures, with a focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Arab-Israeli relations at large.

In a world fraught with conflict and tension, we should be heartened by the efforts of Lana, Michelle and Tara. They show us that the next generation is ready and able to promote dialogue and peace.

As parliamentarians, we should all congratulate and encourage them. I congratulate them and welcome them.

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ROSEMARY BROWN

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week Canada has seen the death of one of its true pioneers. I speak of Ms. Rosemary Brown, the first black woman elected to a provincial legislature in Canada.

This milestone was achieved in 1972 in British Columbia, but Ms. Brown went on to achieve another milestone regarding women and politics.

In 1975 she was the first woman to run for the leadership of a federal political party. She was truly a trailblazer who showed the way for women in politics at every level.

Ms. Brown never gave up on her goal of equality for women. She moved on from political life to that of academia and became a professor of women's studies. She became known across Canada as a champion of justice and equality for women.

Canadians will miss her commitment, her influence and her voice as a champion of women's equality.

* * *

MEMBER FOR LASALLE—ÉMARD

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the member for LaSalle—Émard is having super-duper delusions of grandeur once again. He is trying to sell himself as the saviour of the military, promising more funding and better relations with the U.S.

If the truth be told, this superhero's heavy baggage keeps him from flying at all. It is not that he has not had superpowers before. He was the finance minister for eight years and could have used his position to aid the military then. He just did not know how to use his powers for good and not for evil.

He neglected our military and slashed its budgets. Now he is acting appalled that his own government has not yet replaced our aging Sea King helicopters.

Seems this former finance minister has amazing powers of denial and deception. He has had almost 10 years to pony up the cash for chopper replacements and he could not be bothered. Holy hypocrisy, Batman.

Captain Whirlybird across the way should hitch up his tights because he is a fallen superhero.

"Wait, it's a bird, it's a plane. No, it's an abysmal failure".

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to our health care workers in Toronto and across the country who are working long hours under difficult conditions to control and treat SARS.

We in the House are all aware of the enormous pressures that our health care workers have faced over the past six weeks. They have dealt with death and sickness as well as the fear of SARS but through it all their dedication and heroic efforts have protected and reassured us that the health and well-being of Canadians is paramount.

I want to particularly mention the Humber River Regional Hospital in my own riding, the doctors, nurses and administrative personnel who have worked tirelessly to protect my community.

Rueben Devlin, the President and CEO, is on the frontlines beside his staff providing constant support and comfort. Thanks to the combined efforts of governments and medical teams, the disease is now under control.

I ask members of the House to join with me in remembering those families affected by SARS and to congratulate our health care workers and medical staff on a superb job.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on March 4 of this year, the United Nations expressed severe criticism concerning the status of Canadian women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women calls on the Canadian government to intervene rapidly to stop the rising tide of discrimination against women in Quebec and Canada.

The United Nations committee spotlights the damaging effects on girls and women of the cuts to social programs over the past decade. They are the first people affected by the Liberal government's slashing of funding.

The UN committee says it is astonished that in a country as rich as Canada, 54% of single mothers, 43% of first nations women, 37% of women of colour, and 48% of new immigrant women are poor.

It is intolerable that women should bear the brunt of government cuts. We in the Bloc Québécois deplore this government's deliberate weakening of women's living conditions in recent years.

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[English]

BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

Mr. Ivan Grose (Oshawa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend marks the 60th anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic, the longest battle of the second world war which lasted six arduous years. I am honoured to be leading a delegation of veterans of this battle to Liverpool for a commemorative ceremonies on May 3 and 4.

From the start of the war in 1939 to May 8, 1945, Canadians battled with their allies fending off the attacks of German U-boats while keeping shipping lanes open across the Atlantic Ocean. The merchant ships' success in reaching the United Kingdom with the vital cargoes of supplies and personnel was essential to liberation of Europe.

Month after month turned to year after year. In a pattern unbroken to the end of the war the convoys sailed. Pride and perseverance pulled the Canadian military forces and Merchant Navy through the Battle of the Atlantic.

We pay tribute to the brave men and women who fought so valiantly to protect our values and way of life.

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GILLIGAN'S ISLAND

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, do not miss the latest episode of Liberal *Gilligan's Island*. This week, eccentric millionaire shipping magnate, Thurston Howell III, blames the skipper for allowing the ship of state to go adrift and to wash up on the shores of that deserted isle. But the hilarity does not end there.

When the crisis hits the island the skipper goes golfing. And you will bust a gut as the fur flies between Ginger and Mary-Anne, when brassy Ginger publicly criticizes Mary Ann for not doing her job. At the same time, Ginger, Mr. Howell and the hilariously dull professor are all lining up to replace the skipper who has announced his retirement. But because he will not retire for another year, Gilligan, the skipper's little House leader buddy, has his hands full with trying to keep this mad-cap crew from utterly destroying the island.

Mr. Speaker, it is side splitting humour on Liberal *Gilligan's Island* everyday right here on this channel. Do not miss it.

* * *

RESPONSIBLE FISHING AWARD

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge and congratulate the winners of the Roméo LeBlanc National Awards for Responsible Fishing.

This award recognizes Canadian fishermen who have contributed to the development and promotion of responsible fishing practices from coast to coast. It is individual fishermen who are the most aware of the need to manage fisheries in a responsible manner. This award gives them the recognition they deserve.

S. O. 31

The 2003 recipients, who are on Parliament Hill today, are John Carriere, Tim Richards and Ulf Snarby. They have been chosen by their peers for their significant contribution to responsible fisheries and are role models for the next generation of Canadian fishermen.

I wish to extend congratulations to this year's award winners and thank them for their contribution to responsible fisheries, and I ask my colleagues to do likewise.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to our colleague, the member for Winnipeg Centre, our NDP aboriginal affairs critic. Tirelessly and heroically, he has worked through the aboriginal affairs committee to fight the Liberal government's horrendously prejudiced first nations governance act.

Everyone recognizes that the current Indian Act has not worked. For generations, the Canadian government has dictated to first nations. It has broken our sacred treaties and treated first nations people as subjects rather than partners in this land.

First nations want change, not a repeat of past mistakes. The Liberal government has again refused to listen to first nations people. Of 189 individuals and groups that appeared before the committee, only 10 supported the bill, and that includes the minister and his staff. First nations people oppose this bill. It will force first nations into debt or to sell their land just to meet the basic housing needs and clean drinking water. It will strip them of their self-determination and give control of their lives and communities to Ottawa bureaucrats.

Today the AFN has given our colleague the name of Strong Voice of the Winged One in recognition of the outstanding work he has been doing. On behalf of our caucus and all—

● (1415)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Longueuil.

* * *

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday nearly 50 representatives of the first nations attended—until the wee hours of the morning—the debate on Bill C-7 regarding first nations governance.

In recognition of his convictions and his determination to defend their basic rights, my hon. colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot was given their highest honour, an eagle feather, presented by the shaman himself.

S. O. 31

This great honour is given to individuals who have made exceptional contributions to the betterment of the first nations. According to traditional first nations beliefs, the eagle is the messenger of the gods and, from high in the sky, it has a view of the whole world, and of the past, present and future. This bold and visionary bird is a symbol of power and strength for the first nations.

These same attributes could be applied to our hon. colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

The Bloc Québécois is proud to have among its members a man who values identity and culture so highly.

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QUEBEC GENERAL ELECTION

Ms. Liza Frulla (Verdun—Saint-Henri—Saint-Paul—Pointe Saint-Charles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to remind the House that Jean Charest officially became the Premier of Quebec yesterday, during a ceremony in the National Assembly's Red Room. The new premier then proceeded to introduce and administer the oath of office to the 25 members of his cabinet.

In the speech he made at the ceremony, he expressed his view that the red wave that swept across Quebec on April 14 signifies a new kind of government for Quebecers.

In fact, I was pleasantly surprised to see that eight, or one third, of the new cabinet's members were women. This is the highest percentage in Quebec's history. It is not perfect, but it is a good start.

I want to single out Françoise Gauthier, the member for Jonquière, who is the first women in the history of Quebec to be named Minister of Agriculture.

I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Mr. Charest and his new government and wishing them good luck.

* * *

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, two years ago the Minister for International Trade stated, "It is time to turn toward...free trade in softwood lumber".

At that time, the minister was clear: no interim measures involving border taxes or quota systems. Now it appears that he has reversed himself at least once or twice. We learned in February that the minister was considering an export tax, but then he stated in the House that he would continue to fight for "unlimited access to the American market for Canadian softwood lumber companies, on the basis of free trade". Now we learn that he is considering again a quota system to end this dispute.

The government must guarantee that whatever interim measures are considered or implemented, all stakeholders from east to west will be respected and protected. In particular, the Maritimes and the independent remanufacturing industry may now be penalized for this undue delay. I ask the minister to make the concerns of these companies a priority as he comes to a conclusion.

[Translation]

NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last April 15 to 19 in New York, the National Model United Nations was held; this UN simulation was attended by 3,200 student delegates from the United States and 15 other countries.

Canada was well represented by 325 energetic students. I had the opportunity, as guest speaker, to address the delegates at the NMUN's opening session, as well as the previous evening at a friendly reception hosted by Canada's Ambassador to the UN, Paul Heinbecker.

This year, of the 15 participating Canadian educational institutions, three really stood out, winning NMUN awards in recognition of their delegates' talents and contribution to the debates. They are the Université de Montréal and the University of Victoria, which each received an honourable mention, and the Collège André-Grasset in Montreal, which received the highly coveted distinguished delegation award.

I want to congratulate all our young people who do their country proud and who are working hard to have a positive influence on the world of tomorrow.

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[English]

MASTERS CHAMPION

Mr. Richard Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, there is a new name added to the great names of golf and he is Mike Weir from Bright's Grove, Ontario, Canada.

Weir joins Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and all the other great players of golf who have earned the title Masters Champion. He is the first Canadian and the first left-handed golfer to ever win golf's most revered tournament.

Mike won the Bob Hope Classic and the Nissan Open and made all Canadians proud earlier this year. When he won the Masters he raised that pride to a new level and made Canadian history.

Through grit and determination, Weir won the Masters in a playoff after finishing seven under and safely secured his status as a legend of Canadian golf.

The Canadian Alliance pays tribute to Mike Weir and we wish him continued success. Canada has a new hero and a fine champion. Way to go Mike.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

● (1420)

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is reported today that the health minister received a letter from her counterpart in Ontario. He asked for more rigorous screening at Toronto's airports. The request was made April 4, almost three weeks before the World Health Organization issued its travel advisory against Toronto.

Can the health minister confirm that she received this request and if so, why did she choose to ignore it?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed I did receive the letter and I responded to my colleague's letter. In addition to that letter he and I, and others, have had numerous conversations on an ongoing basis around risk assessment and measures that needed to be put in place both in relation to community containment and in relation to screening incoming and outgoing passengers.

If the hon. member reads the letter, it is quite apparent that Mr. Clement's main concern was in relation to the screening of inbound passengers. In response, not only to his letter but on the advice of on the ground experts in this area, we reviewed our procedures every day and enhanced them as required by the risk assessed.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we all fail to see what is so funny about what the government did here.

Another senior Ontario cabinet minister, Jim Flaherty, said yesterday the following about the health minister's failure to institute proper interviews on outgoing passengers:

It was being done elsewhere and we didn't do it... it ought to have been done. Airports are a federal responsibility.

Since the health minister clearly ignored the advice of the Ontario government, is she prepared to accept responsibility for her own decision, a decision that cost Ontario, Toronto, Canada millions, and resign?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess the opposition are masters at least at one thing and that is the blame game. But, having said that, let us remember—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. We must have some order in the House so we can hear the answer. The Minister of Health has the floor and I know all hon. members want to hear the answer.

Hon. Anne McLellan: Remember, Mr. Speaker, exactly what Dr. Brundtland said yesterday:

In the last week in the case of Toronto we have seen these changes: first of all, the magnitude of the probable SARS has decreased, it has been now 20 days since the last cases of community transmission, and there are no new confirmed export cases out of Toronto or Canada.

All of this took place under our existing procedures. However, if in fact confidence and reassurance can be provided by enhanced measures, then certainly we will move forward with those enhanced measures.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, once again the minister fails to take responsibility.

We now know that the Ontario government thought the minister's approach was wrong. The WHO thought the minister's approach was the wrong way to go and told her repeatedly. The heritage minister thought it was the wrong way to go. The Canadian Alliance said in the House on March 27 that it was the wrong way to go.

If everybody in the world except this minister believes this was the wrong way to go and the minister will not admit this responsibility, how can Canadians have any faith in her ability to handle this kind of situation in the future?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before and I have said in the House many times, in relation to a number of our procedures, including screening procedures, we reviewed the procedures in place on a daily basis. We assessed the risks and where necessary, based on the risk assessment from people on the ground, we enhanced the procedures.

However, in response to the leader of the official opposition's statement that nobody supported what we did, I can do no better than quote Dr. David Heymann who in April said:

Canada is doing an exemplary activity and much of what has been going on in Canada including the system—

● (1425)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Yellowhead.

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the WHO showed that airport screening measures have been inadequate and this minister knows it.

The WHO had called for proactive measures including interviews, but we still have not had a word from this minister as to what measures are going to be in place and when they will be there.

Will the health minister require interviews of outgoing passengers and exactly when will it take place?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, we will make a risk assessment on a daily basis, based on the advice of people on the ground. In fact, I informed Dr. Brundtland and we informed the WHO that we will be enhancing our screening procedures. We are doing this in relation to providing increased confidence and reassurance to the public, and to others.

I can reassure the hon. member, as I have said before, that we will be experimenting with a number of new technologies. We will put them in place as pilot projects and we will share what we learn with the rest of the world.

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that answer is very late and not very exact because we need to know when they are going to be in place and if they are.

Oral Questions

The Ontario government has said that it has been asking the federal government for weeks to impose tighter screening measures at Pearson airport. The health minister's decision to refuse that request has cost Toronto over half a billion dollars. Why would the minister allow voluntary measures instead of mandatory measures in the first place?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all I go back to the fact that we were one of the very first countries to act on the WHO recommendations. In fact, we consulted with the WHO throughout this entire process.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: No.

Hon. Anne McLellan: Oh, yes, we did. Sorry.

In fact, on the basis of risk assessment we do on a daily basis we have advanced screening procedures both inbound and outbound. We remain one of the few countries in the world, as it relates to inbound passengers who on the planes—

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to Yves Séguin, the Quebec finance minister and author of a report that proved beyond all doubt the existence of fiscal imbalance, federal intervention in Quebec's jurisdictions is only possible "because of the resources available to the federal government, resources that are, moreover, more than it needs to look after its own areas of jurisdiction".

Since the money is in Ottawa and the health care and education needs are in Quebec, what is keeping the federal government from moving out of the taxation space it does not belong in?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is something we have been debating for months. Each level of government has its area of jurisdiction for levying taxes.

Almost all of our tax fields are shared with the provincial governments. It is, therefore, not necessary to give them any taxation space. They already have it. Obviously our good administration is what has given us a surplus.

The hon. member, as a member of this House, ought to be congratulating the government because he is part of a Parliament that has succeeded in balancing its books, paying its debts, and having a surplus.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what the Prime Minister is proposing is to raise taxes, which would be irresponsible both here and in Ottawa. The problem is that it is the same taxpayer doing the paying and being overtaxed by Ottawa.

The solution, and I hope the government will admit it, is for Ottawa to redistribute the tax base—not expand it—so that the provinces and Quebec can meet their health care and education needs, these not being areas under federal jurisdiction.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as far as taxation is concerned, everyone acknowledges that we have

made transfer payments to the provinces for health care in the order of \$34.8 billion over five years.

We have reduced taxes over five years by more than \$100 billion, and have met our obligations. Despite all this, we have been fortunate enough to balance the budget and achieve a surplus. He ought to take the credit, along with all the rest of us.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister knows perfectly well that the occasional cheque written by Ottawa does not correct the fiscal imbalance. What Quebec and the provinces want is for the federal government to mind its own business.

Is it so difficult to understand that in order to correct the fiscal imbalance, the federal government has to withdraw from tax fields to give Quebec and the provinces the fiscal resources needed to do their job and assume their responsibilities?

• (1430)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we said during the Quebec election campaign was not just so many empty words. It was the only good response, because whether or not we think there is a fiscal imbalance, what matters is that governments help each other out.

For example, the Prime Minister of Canada made a commitment that if we ever ended up with a greater surplus than expected, an additional \$2 billion would be given to the provinces for health care. That is the kind of help that will be possible in the sort of federation that we will be able to build with a government in Quebec that believes in Canada.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's proposal to increase taxes is irresponsible because, at the end of the day, it is the same taxpayer who has to pay. What is needed is a reallocation of the tax fields.

Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that if the federal government were to agree to this, tax increases would not be needed, and shifting this money from Ottawa to the provinces and to Quebec would enable them to provide the services they must to the public?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have debated this issue time and time again. The member knows quite well that he would be hard pressed to find any other federal government in the world that has a smaller share of public revenues than the Canadian federal government. The share of the federal government's revenues compared to the Canadian economy is lower now than it was in 1949.

Which leads us to wonder, given the repetition of these same questions by the Bloc Québécois, if it is not desperately trying to justify its existence.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Oral Questions

Yesterday the Prime Minister showed up in Toronto without a penny in disaster relief: nothing for small businesses, nothing for hospitality workers. He said it was because federal emergency laws do not cover diseases like SARS. That is not true. Section 4 of the Emergency Preparedness Act covers “emergencies of all types”.

Why did the Prime Minister misrepresent this law and why will he not now do the right thing and help Toronto businesses and hospitality workers who are hurting so badly from the SARS epidemic?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have announced a series of measures to help the workers in that sector. It was announced by the Minister of Human Resources Development. We also have other programs.

I have discussed the question of giving compensation to the businesses with the premier. That is not something that is possible to do under the circumstances because there is no one dedicated tax for that purpose like the one that was reduced yesterday at the provincial level.

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this has nothing to do with dedicated taxes. This has to do with the Emergency Preparedness Act and a crisis for Toronto businesses. The Prime Minister does not know what the hell he is talking about.

My supplementary is to the Prime Minister as well—

The Speaker: Order, please. I am not sure I heard the hon. member's language, but if I heard what I thought I heard, I was shocked. The hon. member will want to be very careful in his choice of language in phrasing his question in order to observe all the proprieties of the House.

Mr. Svend Robinson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will say that he does not know what he is talking about at all. My supplementary is to the Prime Minister as well.

First the government makes the problem worse and then it will not help those that are affected. A month ago Ontario asked for screening. The Minister of Health said no. A few weeks ago the World Health Organization asked. The Minister of Health said no. It is not Toronto—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate that in fact we were one of the very first nations to respond to the WHO recommendation in relation to screening. We worked with the WHO in relation to putting those procedures in place and we have done a daily risk assessment from people on the ground as to whether we needed to enhance those procedures.

Over the past six weeks we have added additional enhancements. We have put additional people on the ground: quarantine officers, nurses, doctors, and others at Pearson and Vancouver airports. As the risk indicated, we enhanced the procedures and at this—

The Speaker: The right hon. member for Calgary Centre.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, regarding inbound passengers, yesterday the son of the member of Parliament for Dauphin—Swan River arrived in Vancouver on Air Canada flight 30 direct from Beijing. He and other passengers filled out a card in Beijing, but they were not screened either in Beijing or in Vancouver. They were not asked any questions about SARS. They

were not given any information on what to do if they began to display symptoms. They just walked off the plane.

How does the Minister of Health explain that? Does Canada's safety depend on cards handed out in Beijing?

• (1435)

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in fact, those cards are passed out to all passengers on flights from cities like Beijing and Hong Kong. Those cards tell about the symptoms of SARS, what to look for, and the incubation period. In addition, we ask for travel locator information so that if someone is thought to be a suspect or probable SARS case coming off that plane, we are able to contact everyone else who was a passenger on that plane.

Let me also inform the hon. member that we have quarantine officers meeting all those planes and those quarantine officers are available and inspecting—

The Speaker: The right hon. member for Calgary Centre.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, the government is a house of cards and what is clear is that Canadian safety depends on cards handed out in Beijing.

My supplementary is to the man responsible for all of this, the Prime Minister. Before or during his vacation in the Dominican Republic, did he see the letter which Ontario sent on April 4? During his belated personal conversation with the World Health Organization did Gro Brundtland tell the Prime Minister directly of her concern about Canada's screening procedures? If the Prime Minister knew these concerns why did he not act?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I never had a communication. She never wrote me a letter, never called me. There was communication with the Department of Health, with the World Health Organization and communication between the ministers of health of the provincial and federal governments. Mr. Clement congratulated the federal minister for the good work that she was doing.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the republic of France is once again leading a tiny coalition of countries to divide the NATO alliance. This week France joined Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg in a summit discussing a new military alliance that would be a counterweight to NATO of which Canada of course is a founding member.

The Prime Minister supported France's last adventure by not joining our allies to confront Saddam Hussein. Why will the Prime Minister not now loudly oppose this latest attempt of France to divide NATO?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the decision about the non-participation in the war in Iraq was announced to the American government a year before, when I discussed that with President Bush. So it was not under the influence of anybody. We said that to participate in a war we needed the support of the Security Council. That was known for more than a year.

We are a member of NATO. We are participating in NATO. We think that NATO is a good organization. I am sure that NATO will survive many such meetings.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, with that type of response it is legitimately in the public interest to know where the Prime Minister gets his advice on these important foreign affairs matters.

I do not fault the Prime Minister's family ties with his nephew, our Ambassador to France, or with Paul Demarais Sr. who is the largest individual shareholder of France's largest corporation, Total Fina Elf, which has billions of dollars of contracts with Saddam's former regime.

With this valuable source of information and experience at his fingertips, has the Prime Minister ever discussed Iraq or France with his family or friends in the Demarais empire?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I never thought that this gentleman would go so low as to attack one of the best bureaucrats we have had in years in the Department of Foreign Affairs because he is my nephew.

I hope he will repeat the attack against the people who have invested money in something outside and he will face the consequences.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order please. We are moving on to the next question.

● (1440)

[Translation]

The hon. member for Roberval has the floor, and we will hear the question.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the fact that it persistently denies the existence of the fiscal imbalance, in spite of the fact that it was very clearly demonstrated by the Séguin report, proves that the federal government is using this fiscal imbalance for its own purposes.

My question to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs is the following. Will the minister admit that the fiscal imbalance is serving the federal government's strategy, allowing it to interfere in areas that are not under its jurisdiction, and that its existence is purposely denied?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will certainly not deny the need for the members of a federation to help one another out. In the coming years, the

Government of Canada will increase transfers to the provinces by 7.3% annually. A Conference Board study predicts a growth rate of 5.3% annually for health care expenditures for the provinces. If we are able to do more, we will. There is no doubt, however, that the best way for the federal government to help the provinces is to never go back into deficit.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, clearly the federal government is not likely to go back into deficit when it is collecting too much tax money compared to its responsibilities. In spite of its mismanagement, there will always be some surplus somewhere, which can be given as handouts to the provinces. That is the reality.

I wonder if the minister would be kind enough to clearly state that regardless of who is in office in Quebec, be it the PQ or the Liberals, the federal government's answer remains, "Forget it".

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the federal government's answer is that, in a federation, we have to help one another out. The hon. member can keep asking the same question over and over, but I found his comment—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Stéphane Dion: I found his comment irresponsible.

President Clinton left a \$200 billion surplus. With comments like the one just made by the hon. member, our modest surplus would melt away. The fact is that today, the United States has a deficit of about \$500 billion US. We must continue to act responsibly. That is the best way to help all the governments in this federation.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, at midnight tonight the deadline expires for Canadians to file their income tax returns. Despite its statements to the contrary, after 10 years in office the government has failed to deliver any form of meaningful tax relief. Canadians still pay almost half of every dollar to Liberal boondoggles like the gun registry, sponsorship abuse and GST fraud. This compares to 19¢ for shelter, 14¢ for transportation and 11¢ for food.

Why will the Minister of Finance not immediately reduce personal income taxes and stop punishing hardworking Canadians?

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we thank the hon. member for that news announcement about the taxes this evening. Maybe the member should know while he is filing his taxes that in October 2000 the government introduced a \$100 billion tax cut. This is the third year of it.

Again, we are in the business of reducing taxes, not increasing taxes. Maybe the hon. member should check his figures before he sends them in tonight.

Oral Questions

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the member knows full well that any reduction in taxes has been eaten up by other Liberal tax increases.

The truth is that before the Liberals took power, tax freedom day was June 8. Now it is June 28. Under the leadership of the former finance minister, the Liberals are making Canadians work 20 days more to pay taxes while health care and the military are still starved in this country.

Why will the minister not do the right thing and reduce personal income taxes by cutting the fat in the government and not the hearts out of Canadians' hopes and dreams?

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to reducing fat, I would remind the member that in February in the budget the minister announced that \$1 billion will be saved across the board. I did not hear the member get up and applaud us for that. I did not hear the hon. member stand and thank us for the work we have been doing both on the capital tax reduction and elimination and the \$100 billion tax cut.

Again, the government reduces taxes. It pays off the national debt, as we are doing, down to 44.5% from 71.5% five years ago. We eliminated the national deficit. What is the problem over there?

* * *

• (1445)

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage has suggested that she might soon make an announcement about the Canadian Television Fund, which she cut by \$25 million, thereby compromising television production in Canada and Quebec.

Has the minister changed her mind about the fund and is she now prepared to erase the \$25 million in cuts that we have been condemning ever since the last budget was brought down?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has been approached by many members, including the members for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and Lac-Saint-Louis, and Quebec's former minister of culture. Clearly, the Minister of Finance is very open to discussion. That is why we should be making an announcement shortly.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since we have asked the minister many times to review her decision about the Canadian Television Fund, could she announce whatever she is going to announce here in the House, rather than using this as a promotional tool in her leadership campaign?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope that when the Minister of Finance and I are ready to make an announcement, we will be able to do so in Montreal where the artists themselves launched their plea. Others did likewise in Toronto, the Maritimes and from one ocean to the other. Obviously, this cause has touched all Canadians.

[English]

AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, here we are again. Eight air carriers have died in the six years that the transport minister has been imposed on Canadians and the air industry. Air Canada is in bankruptcy protection with 35,000 jobs in limbo. Today we learned that WestJet's profit in this quarter is down 89% compared to where it was last year.

How many more signals does the transport minister need? How many more notifications does he have to get to figure out that his air policies have failed and that it is his responsibility to lower taxes and respond to get more people flying and to help the air industry rather than tax it into the ground, which is all he has done?

Hon. David Collette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member seems oblivious to the fact that the world economy has been under great stress. We have had the war in Iraq. In Canada we have had the threat of SARS.

This is not a Canadian phenomenon only. This is also an international problem, one that has been heralded by the fact that two major carriers in the United States are under bankruptcy protection and American Airlines is teetering on the balance of bankruptcy protection.

I think the hon. member should try to frame his questions in a larger context, understanding that this is a problem that is worldwide.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the transport minister does not know what he is talking about. It is a Canadian problem.

In the United States, Southwest Airlines is reporting a profit. Last week JetBlue reported a profit. In Europe, Ryan Air is reporting a profit. Their profits are going up. WestJet's profits are going down, because in jurisdictions where taxes are lower, the air industry is doing better. In Canada it is being devastated by the transport minister.

Two weeks ago the transport committee unanimously supported the Canadian Alliance position to eliminate the air tax, to cut air fuel taxes in half and to put a freeze on landing fees and airport rents. When will the transport minister implement any one of these three recommendations?

Hon. David Collette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said on a number of occasions, we are looking at the issue of airport rents. I might remind the hon. member that when those airport authorities signed agreements with the crown, they did so with the full knowledge of what the terms would be on the life of those particular agreements.

In the real world sometimes people do not make profits. In the real world when we sign a deal, we sign a deal and we go into it knowing to what we are entitling ourselves and what the obligations are.

I would ask the hon. member to take a broader view of this and understand the whole context in which Canadian airlines are operating and the Canadian aviation industry is operating.

Oral Questions

HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Andy Savoy (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry.

There is a stretch of Trans-Canada Highway in my riding that claims on average nine lives a year. We are home to the most trucks per capita in Canada and to many industries such as agriculture, forestry and manufacturing which rely on these roads daily.

The \$400 million highway twinning agreement was made last August between federal and provincial governments. It has now been eight months and my constituents have seen no sign of construction.

Could the minister please inform Canadians why this much needed construction has been delayed?

• (1450)

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister announced money for this highway last August. We fully expected the province would wield the shovel, lay the asphalt and get on with the job. Instead it went to sleep for eight months, despite the fact we told it time and again there was nothing to prevent it from proceeding with the construction.

After eight months of slumber, the province has finally come alive, only to whine about the federal government. We think it should build the road. That is what is needed. We have been waiting for it to do that. Why has it not? Could it have anything to do with the fact that it is about to call a provincial election?

* * *

FISHERIES

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year the Russian ship *Olga* had 49 tonnes of cod, which is under a moratorium, in its hold and Canada did nothing.

I have a Russian manifest of another ship that had the equivalent of 650,000 pounds of groundfish in its hold on April 8, 2002 in Bay Roberts, Newfoundland. Again the government did absolutely nothing.

Why does the government destroy and kill the hopes and aspirations of Newfoundland fishermen and their families and does nothing to the foreigners who rape and pillage our resource?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it would be helpful if the hon. member would learn to read page two of the manifest.

On occasion some of those vessels which are out fishing for over a year at a time visit many fishing waters, transship from one vessel to the other and can have their results of fishing not only in the waters of Canada's jurisdiction but in other parts of the world.

We verify and if we do not like it, we take action when there are illegal activities. That is why we use air flights, satellite monitoring and the observer program.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the thousands of Newfoundland fishermen and their families and the plant workers and their families, I would like the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans

through the medium of television to stand up and tell those people once and for all, will he revisit the decision he made last Thursday?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy that the hon. member is speaking for the people of Newfoundland, but I am a lot more happy that they have better representatives in this very chamber.

The decision I made, as I indicated to him yesterday, was a very difficult decision, a decision made—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order. Now I cannot hear a word. The Chair has to be able to hear the answer the minister is giving. If everybody yells at the same time, it is quite impossible. The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has the floor. He might say something out of order and I have to be able to hear it.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, as I was indicating, in debate last night and in the press conference we indicated that we made a very difficult decision, a decision to conserve, protect and rebuild those stocks in order to have resources for those very communities in future generations and in future years.

* * *

HEALTH

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the minister of international development whether during her visit to China in January she had heard information leading her to believe that there might be an outbreak in China of a new contagious disease and whether she had discussed that with colleagues or officials here. She replied categorically no.

I have submitted a question asking for the production of relevant papers. I wonder if on reflection the minister would like to reconsider her answer.

Hon. Susan Whelan (Minister for International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was in China in early January. I believe the dates were January 9 to January 12. SARS had not been identified by the World Health Organization as a concern in China at that time. During my visit I was never made aware of any information regarding the early stages of SARS.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just told the House he never spoke to Mr. Brundtland. Yesterday the Minister of Health said:

As Dr. Brundtland and I discussed last week, as the Prime Minister and Dr. Brundtland discussed, and as my colleague Tony Clement and I have discussed—

Why the fabrication on behalf of the Prime Minister?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Brundtland wears skirts. I talked to her last week and she called me yesterday. She acted very diligently. I told her that we appreciated that. Last week the Minister of Health called her very rapidly the morning after I called the former prime minister of Norway. She acted very well and very responsibly. We are grateful for that.

*Oral Questions***INDUSTRY**

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday my colleague asked the Minister of Industry if he accepted the industry committee report which called for the lowering of ownership restrictions in the telecommunications and broadcasting industry. He did not answer. He just kind of waffled around.

The heritage minister also has an interest in this report. I want to ask her, does she agree with the industry committee report that the foreign restrictions should be lowered on telecommunications and particularly on broadcasters and broadcast distribution?

• (1455)

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the rules of the House adopted by all members provide that after a committee makes a report the government is given an opportunity, 150 days, to consider and respond. We are going to take advantage of that opportunity to look carefully at a report that the committee worked very hard on and which contains wide ranging recommendations. These are important matters. It is an excellent report. We will look at it very carefully. We will come back with a reasoned response as soon as we practically can.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this issue is an issue that has been in the public domain for a fair length of time. It is very interesting that the heritage minister does not seem to be particularly silent when it comes to talking about the health minister. I wonder if she could talk about this particular report. Does she agree or does she not agree that the foreign ownership restrictions should be lowered, yes or no? Or has the cat got her tongue?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this remarkable and insatiable curiosity the hon. member has will just have to be satisfied in some other way.

I think the only responsible thing to do is to take the time necessary to look at the report. In fact, members on this side, all of us, are going to discuss it and consider it and plot the way forward. As soon as we have done that, we will respond, certainly within the time limits prescribed by the House, so that the hon. member will have his answer.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Industry is shirking his responsibilities by repeating that the retail price of gasoline is a provincial matter. But we are not asking him a question about prices, but rather about possible competition problems, and competition is his responsibility.

Instead of engaging in a battle of wits, the minister ought to be worrying about the hundreds of millions of dollars in profit that the oil and gas companies pocketed during the first three months of 2003. Does he realize that it is irresponsible not to ask the Competition Bureau to investigate?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was not prepared yesterday, nor am I prepared today, nor will I be

prepared tomorrow, to agree that the federal government should act in a provincial jurisdiction. It is unacceptable. The Bloc members are the ones trying to centralize. This is unacceptable. I insist that provincial jurisdiction be respected, especially in a matter as important as this.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what the minister is doing is making himself an active accomplice in a situation where millions of consumers are being penalized. He is refusing to use the Competition Bureau to investigate a situation that does not make sense.

Is the minister going to assume his responsibilities or wait until the Standing Committee on Industry, Sciences and Technology does it for him?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Quebec has already created an energy board to monitor the retail price situation and ensure that consumers are protected. I suggest that the hon. member express his concerns to the government in a position to act, that is, the Government of Quebec.

* * *

[*English*]

FISHERIES

Mr. Andy Burton (Skeena, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, some aboriginal people and others on the west coast have suggested that a commercial seal harvest in that area would be good for them, good for their communities, good for the economy, and good for the fish stocks.

If the minister believes that the impact of seals on fish stocks is part of the problem on the east coast, then why is he so blind to the seal predation problem on the west coast? What is the hang-up?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has approached me with representatives, people from his community interested in the commercial harvest of seals. I have not put aside that possibility. We will consider any possible commercial harvest of marine resources where they are sustainable and where there are commercial advantages.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, imagine that, they are still studying it. Yesterday the minister of fisheries admitted he has no real plan for the recovery of the Atlantic cod, yet what does he want to do? Another study. He wants to spend \$6 million to try to find out what seals eat. Guess what? Seals eat fish. Even his own DFO scientists will tell him that each seal eats one tonne of fish each year.

Does the minister believe that seals are part of the problem? If so, why in the world would he spend even a penny, never mind \$6 million, to find out the obvious?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member will know that we outlined a comprehensive plan for the rebuilding of these stocks, including \$6 million to outline and study the predator-prey relationship between seals and cod, and to delineate some seal exclusion zones in critical areas for the reproduction and growth of cod stocks.

*Oral Questions***PORT OF CHURCHILL**

Mr. John Harvard (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Port of Churchill in northern Manitoba is one of Canada's most important inland ports and plays an important role in economic development and tourism activities in that region. The port experienced a very difficult year last year.

Could the minister responsible for the province of Manitoba indicate what the Government of Canada is doing to ensure the economic future of the Port of Churchill?

Hon. Rey Pagtakhan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of State (Science, Research and Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that the Government of Canada, in partnership with the Government of Manitoba, at noon today has offered \$2.2 million toward the economic sustainability of the Port of Churchill and the Hudson Bay railway: \$1.8 million for needed infrastructure improvements and \$400,000 for enhanced marketing strategies. I thank the Secretary of State for Western Diversification for his prompt response. The Port of Churchill is vital to the economy of Manitoba.

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, West Nile virus is the next medical threat to face Canadians. We know that West Nile virus in the blood system can kill. It already has in Ontario.

The minister has promised a screening test by July 1. Will that test be available for all blood across Canada by July 1? How effective will it be?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly we hope that the test will be effective. We have been working with those who are developing these tests to ensure that upon receipt of the application, which is not within our control, it will be dealt with immediately. In fact, we have every confidence that as long as the application is received in a timely fashion the test will be available for blood screening on July 1.

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the SARS virus has exposed the dangers we face when a government fails to prepare. We have known for more than a year that West Nile virus will be a problem this summer. What specific steps has the minister taken to deal with the possibility that a blood screening test for West Nile virus will not be ready by July 1?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with Canadian Blood Services officials a few weeks ago we discussed this issue. I asked about the effectiveness of the test. In their opinion the test will be effective. We will have it. If we receive the application in time it will be available by July 1. I then asked what happens if that is not the case. They in fact have put in place additional measures and further measures that anticipate the fact that if for some reason as of July 1 that test is not available, they will have fallback precautions.

● (1510)

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in connection with the missile defence shield issue, the member for LaSalle—Émard has criticized the Canadian government's indecision and lack of leadership. As usual, the Prime Minister is just sitting back and letting things take their course.

Could the Prime Minister break with his usual wait and see attitude and announce his intentions in connection with the missile defence shield?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government's priority has always been to ensure the protection of Canada and Canadians. We are, of course, prepared to discuss anything related to that protection with anyone.

The idea of the missile defence shield is out there, and we are going to consider whether it is appropriate to examine the possibility of holding discussions with our American colleagues in the spirit of ensuring the protection of the North American continent. This is how we have always dealt with this matter with our American friends.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES

Mr. Shawn Murphy (Hillsborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. The fourth national fisheries awards and the Roméo LeBlanc medal presentation will take place this evening in the Parliament Buildings. The former Governor General, the Right Hon. Roméo LeBlanc, and the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans will attend the ceremonies hosted by Senator Comeau, the chair of the fisheries committee in the other place.

These awards recognize the positive contributions of Canadian fishermen for putting in place the Canadian code of conduct for responsible fishing operations. Could the minister elaborate on the importance of this award to fishermen in particular and to Canadians in general?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Hillsborough for his question. This is the fourth year that those involved in the fishery have come together to celebrate the hard work of some remarkable Canadians who are committed to making Canadian fishing practices the best in the world. I believe it is important to point out that the award winners come from fishing regions across Canada, and they are selected by their peers, a tribute, Mr. Speaker, that I am sure you will appreciate.

I believe that in light of the recent difficult news in the fishery sector the timing could not be better to highlight the efforts that the fishing industry itself is making to promote a strong, ethical stewardship for the future.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 81(14) to inform the House that the motion to be considered tomorrow during the consideration of the business of supply is as follows:

[*Translation*]

That this House recognize the urgency of amending the Canada Labour Code to ban the use of strike breakers.

This motion, standing in the name of the hon. member for Laurentides, is not votable.

[*English*]

Copies of the motion are available at the table.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, toward the end of question period the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia asked a question with regard to ports. He asked the question of the minister in charge of Manitoba. Then the Minister of Veterans Affairs got up and answered the question. Is this a new precedent for the House?

In the past when the opposition has asked a question of the political minister of a province, it has been refused in regard to asking the question. It was allowed to happen today and I just want to make sure that same opportunity will be available in the future to all opposition members.

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I apologize for the incident in question. Obviously the question should have been answered by the Minister of Transport or possibly the minister responsible for western economic diversification had the question been posed that way, because of course there would have been a relationship in that regard. As I indicate, in the past I certainly have personally reprimanded colleagues on the other side of the House for asking questions this way.

The Speaker: There was so much noise in the chamber the Chair could not hear the question that the hon. member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia was putting. I am sorry I missed the reference to the fact that this was being put to a minister responsible. Had I heard it, the Chair might have intervened in the circumstances, but I know that the government House leader exercises due diligence in respect of questions that are put by his colleagues. I suspect that with proper attention to this there will not be a repeat of that kind of mistake, at least one wishes. We will see what happens with that one and I will review the matter and if necessary get back to the House.

DECORUM IN THE CHAMBER

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, with regret I rise to draw your attention again to language that I believe should not be permitted in the House. Perhaps, Sir, because of your acceptance of language from the Minister of Health two days ago that accused me of fabricating, inventing or concocting evidence, I am interested in how widely the door has been opened.

Points of Order

I draw your attention, Sir, to two exchanges that stand on the pages of *Hansard* from last night. The first is at page 5609. I quote:

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by saying that this is an extremely difficult issue with which everyone is involved.

Mr. Lawrence O'Brien: Did you hear what he said to me? He told me to f-off.

An hon. member: I did not.

Mr. Lawrence O'Brien: Yes you did.

Then at—

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the right hon. member, but I know he will not want to use members' names. He can go with the constituency name, which is quite satisfactory. One cannot do indirectly what one is not allowed to do directly. That means members cannot read names into the record when the title of the person or the name of the constituency will do. I am hearing the right hon. member, but I wish he would refrain from bandying names about, as they say.

Right Hon. Joe Clark: Mr. Speaker, I will take it as your ruling that to read and quote from *Hansard* is to bandy about. On page 5618, the member of Parliament for Labrador stated:

I am absolutely furious and devastated at what I have witnessed over the last 24 hours in bringing forward the plight here to DFO, the PMO and everybody else. To hear the kind of insults that were slurred at me tonight by the Minister of Fisheries is unreal. I just asked the Minister of Fisheries tonight that if he were from Labrador would he have made that decision. I do not want to repeat in public what he said back to me.

Mr. Speaker, I was here with Mr. Trudeau when he uttered words that were passed off as fuddle duddle. Again last night members of the House who were defending the legitimate interests of the people of Atlantic Canada were subjected to abuse, apparently by a minister of the Crown. What is more troubling is that once again the Chair did not intervene to preserve the dignity of the House and the rights of the members, no matter what their views or where they sit, to represent their constituents, free from insults and from intimidation.

No doubt the leader of the government will wring his hands with unctuous regret in his response, but I think, Sir, that the House last night saw the true face of the government, and the fact that the Chair did not intervene is a source of real regret to me and, I would hope, Sir, to you.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was speaking at the time the leader of the fifth party was referring to statements that were made.

Routine Proceedings

This is a very dignified place. This was a very straightforward and productive debate that was held last night. While yes, at times, as a participant in that debate I can attest that emotions did sometimes flare, and there was discussion both behind the curtains and among members opposite and members on this bench, I would remind not only those listening to this conversation or discussion right now but those who are producing *Hansard*, as well as those who may have been watching on television, that seals were often a significant component of the discussion last night. While there may have been some miscommunication or misinterpretation, I would simply say we should remember that both official languages were being spoken in the House at the point in time. If we were to translate "seal", maybe that might allow for what the misinterpretation might have been.

The Speaker: I am quite prepared to hear points of order, but I warn hon. members that it sounds as though this might be a resumption of the debate, which we are not of course prepared to have.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would not have inserted myself into this discussion on the point of order except for the insertion by the member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte.

I was in the chamber last night. I was here when the member for Labrador came in at the end of the speech by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. Heatedly, he made a remark to the minister, having just come back from his own riding, and we all know what is happening in areas such as his. The minister turned around and made some remark to him, at which time the member for Labrador yelled quite loudly and profusely, as is recorded in *Hansard*, what the minister said to him. It was not a French remark about a seal. It was a comment. A follow-up occurred later, which I will not get into.

But, Mr. Speaker, the insertion by the member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte is not a fact at all. What is in *Hansard* is what you have to deal with.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too was here last night and watched the disgusting display brought upon the member for Labrador. As an official opposition member over here in the New Democratic Party, I felt very sad and I regret what he had to face. For the minister for Newfoundland to come before you in the House, Mr. Speaker, and say what he just said brings him further into the dirt. It is incredible that he can stand in the House and make that kind of comment when he knows it simply is not true.

● (1515)

The Speaker: The Chair will look into the question raised by the right hon. member for Calgary Centre. I will examine the blues and have a look at the tape of the proceedings to see if anything is visible on the tape in respect of this matter. I will get back to the House in due course.

Right Hon. Joe Clark: Mr. Speaker, this matter keeps getting complicated.

[*Translation*]

Like all other members here, I have great respect for Canada's Official Languages Act.

[*English*]

I would hope that the government House leader, if not others, would encourage his junior colleague in the cabinet not to pretend that this was a statement made in French and not to make fun of a second official language in the country, but to stand up, admit that he made a mistake last night and have the honour to withdraw his remarks.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Speaker, that was not the intent at all. In fact, I did not hear any comments. I was speaking at the time. I just simply say that for the dignity of the House that we respect hon. members, that there was no misintent by anyone. I think what was really important that happened last night, and if I could just stress one point, let us not get sidetracked by what the intent of the debate was, we had a very good discussion last night. It was very productive. I am simply saying that I did not hear anything. I wish I did, but I did not. I was speaking at the time, and I simply ask the hon. member that we take the debate as it was, value it and take the input from it and we will leave it at that.

The Speaker: There seem to be some differences of opinion as to what was said. Nobody seems to have heard anything. We are relying on the written record in *Hansard* as to some allegations as to what was said. As I indicated, the Chair will look into the matter and get back to the House. I do not think there is any point in continuing the discussion further.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-34, an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Ethics Commissioner and Senate Ethics Officer) and other acts in consequence.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker pursuant to Standing Order 34 I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian section of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, and the financial report relating to it.

The report concerns the meeting of the APF'S Commission de la coopération du développement, held in Ottawa, Canada, from March 25 to 28, 2003.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Walt Lastewka (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

In accordance with its orders of reference on Thursday, October 24, 2002, and Tuesday, April 1, 2003, the committee has considered Bill C-249, an act to amend the Competition Act and agreed on Monday, April 28, 2003, to report it with one amendment.

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of tabling, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Pursuant Standing Order 108, the committee passed the following resolution:

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages express its support for the initiative of Mauril Bélanger, M.P. (Ottawa-Vanier), in the *Quigley v. Canada* (House of Commons) case, and request the House of Commons suggest to its Board of Internal Economy to make available a maximum budget of \$30,000 to cover a portion of the legal fees incurred by Mr. Bélanger for his role as intervener in this case.

It was agreed, on Tuesday April 29, 2003, that the Chair report this motion to the House.

* * *

● (1520)

[English]

PETITIONS

MARRIAGE

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present the following petition which has signatures from all across this nation. Whereas the majority of Canadians support the current legal definition of marriage as the voluntary union of a single male and a single female and whereas it is the duty of Parliament to ensure that marriage as it has always been known and legally affirmed in Canada be preserved and protected, therefore, the undersigned petition Parliament to use all possible legislative and administrative measures involving invoking section 33 of the charter, the notwithstanding clause, if necessary, to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage as between one man and one woman.

CANADIAN EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COLLEGE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the petitioners of Ontario recognize that the lack of a nationally coordinated plan involving all relevant federal departments contributed to the financial devastation in Toronto and, more important, the deaths resulting from SARS.

Therefore the petitioners request that Parliament recognize that the Canadian Emergency Preparedness College is essential to training Canadians for these types of emergency situations, that the facility should stay in Arnprior, and that the government should upgrade the facilities in order to provide the necessary training to Canadians that we have seen is so necessary.

IRAQ

Mr. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I would like to present a petition from 120 of my constituents which suggests that because Canada is a member of the United Nations and the UN was created to ensure peace, it commends the UN and Canada for seeking a peaceful solution in the Iraq situation and wants to continue to do so.

FISHERIES

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

The first petition has to do with the issue of salmon farming. The petitioners note that the federal minister has a constitutional obligation to protect wild fish and their habitats, and they call upon Parliament to ensure that the minister fulfills his obligation to protect wild fish and their habitats from the effects of salmon farming.

● (1525)

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the second petition has to do with management fees imposed upon the shrimp fishery on the west coast in British Columbia. That issue at one point was resolved and now it seems that it is a problem again.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to ensure that their rights and the conditions of British Columbia's union with Canada be recognized, and that their rights then as fishermen and the fees that they have to pay are fulfilling the obligation that was taken when British Columbia entered Confederation.

BILL C-250

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the third petition has to do with Bill C-250. The petitioners call upon Parliament to protect freedom of speech and freedom of religion, and to reject Bill C-250.

COAST GUARD

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the last and fourth petition has to do with the Coast Guard. The petitioners call upon the government to fulfill its obligation to fully fund the Coast Guard, to replace the hovercraft that was pulled out of service in Vancouver last year, and, most important, to separate the Coast Guard from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and restore the funding.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a number of petitions here from residents within my riding.

These petitioners express disappointment in the future direction of safety net programs under APF, and request that Parliament direct the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the cabinet to use some of the APF promotion budget to inform Canadians that investment in adequate safety nets is a food security issue.

Routine Proceedings

They also request that Parliament direct the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and cabinet to maintain current programs until the new APF safety nets are designed adequately to move agriculture beyond crisis management, not deeper into crisis management.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second group of petitions are representative of people right across this province, people from Beamsville, Port Perry, Ancaster, Toronto, and Brantford. They are not rural people necessarily, but they believe that the government has failed to provide any conclusive or verifiable evidence that the registration of long guns is preventing crime or keeping guns out of the hands of criminals.

They are calling upon Parliament to abolish the national firearms registry for long guns and redirect our tax dollars to programs in support of health care and law enforcement.

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, these almost 700 petitioners draw the attention of the House to the fact that hundreds of thousands of Canadians suffer from debilitating diseases and that Canadians do support ethical stem cell research, which already has shown encouraging potential to provide cures and therapies for these illnesses and diseases.

They also remind us that non-embryonic stem cells, known as adult stem cells, have shown significant research progress without the immune rejection or ethical problems associated with embryonic stem cells.

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

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to table still more petitions adding to the thousands that have already been tabled in the House expressing Canadians' insistence that international law, UN charter provisions and United Nations decisions be fully respected by Canada and other countries in relation to Iraq and other conflicts around the world.

BILL C-420

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have a bundle of petitions to present today on the subject of freedom of choice in natural health products and personal health care.

There are approximately 30,000 signatures and more coming in daily from coast to coast. The action called for would be accomplished by passing my private member's Bill C-420.

These Canadians are calling upon Parliament to recognize that natural health products are foods, not drugs, and that access to these safe products should not be unduly curtailed by government bureaucrats and antiquated legislation.

They call upon Parliament to recognize that the weight of modern scientific evidence confirms the mitigation and prevention of many

diseases and disorders through the judicious use of natural health products.

The petitioners ask Parliament to restore freedom of choice in natural health products by deleting subsections 3(1) and (2), and schedule A of the Food and Drugs Act.

Private member's Bill C-420, currently before the House, addresses the concerns of these citizens, the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Health and the Office of Natural Health Products' transition team that reported in March 2000.

It is my hope that all members of the House will support this initiative and give Canadians the freedom of choice in natural health products for which they are looking.

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions today. The first is with regard to stem cell research.

The petitioners from my riding of Mississauga South would like to point out that Canadians do support ethical stem cell research which has already shown encouraging potential to provide cures and therapies for Canadians.

The petitioners also want to point out that non-embryonic stem cells, which are also known as adult stem cells, have shown significant research progress without the immune rejection or ethical problems associated with embryonic stem cells.

The petitioners therefore call upon Parliament to focus its legislative support on adult stem cell research for those cures and therapies for Canadians.

● (1530)

MARRIAGE

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is with regard to the definition of marriage.

The petitioners want to draw to the attention of the House that the majority of Canadians believe that the fundamental matters of social policy should be decided by elected members of Parliament and not by the unelected judiciary.

The petitioners also want to point out that it is the duty of Parliament to ensure that marriage, as it has always been known and legally affirmed in Canada, must be preserved and protected.

The petitioners therefore call upon Parliament to use all possible legislative and administrative measures, including the use of section 33 of the charter, also known as the notwithstanding clause, to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage as between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

CANADIAN INSTITUTES OF HEALTH RESEARCH

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the final petition has to do with the funding of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

The petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that it is the objective scientific fact that a human being exists from fertilization, and that the Canadian Institutes of Health Research have recommended guidelines on stem cell research that includes the use of human embryos and aborted fetal tissue.

The petitioners therefore call upon Parliament to ban embryo research and direct that the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to support and fund only promising ethical research that does not involve the destruction of human life.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would you be so kind as to call Starred Question No. 168. I ask that the answer to Starred Question No. 168 be made an order for return. This return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 168—**Mr. Guy St-Julien:**

In the case of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Western Economic Diversification Canada, Federal Economic Development Initiative in Northern Ontario (FedNor), and Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA): (a) how much money will be allocated to each of them in fiscal year 2003-2004; (b) how will it be distributed in each agency by number of person-years and by work location and position; and (c) how does Industry Canada allocate funding according to federal transfers for these agencies?

(Return tabled.)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would you be so kind as to call Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers No. 29, in the name of the hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar.

Motion P-29

That a humble Address be presented to Her Excellency praying that she will cause to be laid before this House a copy of all memos, notes, minutes of meetings and reports, including all cost-saving reports, regarding the restructuring of Canadian Blood Services facilities in Saskatchewan; specifically regarding Saskatoon's blood laboratories department relocation to Regina.

Mr. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, Canadian Blood Services is a blood establishment and, as such, is regulated by Health Canada. Authority to regulate this establishment does not include jurisdiction over its business decisions but focuses instead on safety issues around the blood system.

Government Orders

These establishment business decisions do not fall under the jurisdiction of Health Canada.

If the member were here I would therefore ask her to withdraw the motion. However, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. Minister of the Environment to agree to have this matter transferred for debate.

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that this Motion for the Production of Papers be transferred for debate.

The Speaker: The motion is transferred for debate.

Mr. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENTS ORDERS

[English]

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT ACT

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.) moved that Bill C-9, an act to amend the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the House on Bill C-9, an act to amend the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. The act applies to federal decisions about projects

It was brought into force in 1995 by this government. Since that time some 40,000 environmental assessments have been conducted by 30 federal departments, boards and agencies. The projects assessed have ranged from the relatively small, such as the rebuilding of the Laurier Bridge here in Ottawa, to more complex proposals such as the Voisey's Bay mine proposal in Labrador.

The purpose of an environmental assessment is to ensure that the environmental effects of a proposed development are identified, assessed and that, as far as possible, mitigation is done early in the planning phase of the project. It is a precautionary tool that is now used in more than 100 countries.

[Translation]

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act contains a provision requiring a review of the act five years after its coming into force.

In preparing for this review, the first step was to ask ourselves, "What is wrong with the existing legislation?"

We heard the concerns about the lack of consistency and certainty in the manner the current process is applied. We also examined issues relating to the quality of assessments. In addition, we heard the concerns about the limited public participation in the on-going process.

Government Orders

I officially launched the review of the act in December 1999, with the release of a discussion paper, and a series of public consultations across the country.

I wanted this review to focus on the development of solutions to problems identified not only by the government but also by those involved in the assessments, environmental groups, industry representatives, aboriginal people and environmental assessment practitioners.

In March 2001, I tabled before Parliament my report on the results of the review and introduced Bill C-19, this bill's predecessor.

● (1535)

[*English*]

Making amendments to environmental laws is never an easy task because the issues are technical and complex. Often views are polarized as to what is the best approach and the stakes of course are very high. However I believe with Bill C-9 we have met those challenges. I believe this legislation responds effectively to concerns about uncertainty, inconsistent quality and limitations to public participation.

When the bill was originally introduced in March of 2001, environmental and industry groups praised it as a step in the right direction. For example, the Canadian Environmental Network and the Mining Association of Canada both issued press releases which were positive at that time.

I am very pleased to report that the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development did excellent work examining these proposed changes. I want to take this opportunity to thank the chair and the members of the standing committee for their diligent review of the bill and their thoughtful suggestions and proposed amendments to the bill.

I am especially grateful, if I may take a moment to congratulate one member in particular, to the member for Kitchener Centre for her steadfast work on Bill C-9 in her role as my former parliamentary secretary. She quarterbacked this review process for me and did an absolutely outstanding job.

During its review of Bill C-9, the standing committee also benefited enormously from the advice provided by environmental groups, representatives of industry, aboriginal peoples, individual citizens and academics. I was also particularly fortunate to have received an excellent report of consensus recommendations from my multi-stakeholder regulations advisory committee on how to fix the problems of the current act.

I would like now to describe some of the highlights in Bill C-9 including amendments made by the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development.

First, there are amendments to close gaps and plug loopholes. One of the most significant amendments extends the environmental assessment obligations to crown corporations and this will occur three years after royal assent on Bill C-9. This means that projects initiated by some 40 crown corporations will be subject to environmental assessment.

Further, the standing committee also closed a potential loophole created by the federal court decision in the Red Hill Creek Expressway case that could have been used in the future by project proponents to avoid the requirements of the act. The bill would remove an existing gap that excludes federally funded projects on first nations reserve lands from the requirements for an assessment.

Bill C-9 also provides new authority for regulations to require assessments of projects undertaken by non-federal entities on federal lands, such as, for example airport authorities.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

In the Speech from the Throne, Bill C-9 was cited as a model of "smart regulation" because it will enhance the efficiency of the environmental assessment process.

By improving coordination and the operation of the act, the provisions concerning the federal environmental assessment coordinator will allow a more efficient process to be put into place.

The bill makes it impossible for projects that have already undergone scrutiny as part of a comprehensive review to be subject to an assessment by a panel. Bill C-9 provides a new model of class screenings to examine efficiently less important, smaller projects.

The importance of working together with our provincial partners and with the aboriginal people is clearly recognized in this legislation. These changes as well as all other changes made to the bill will make the environmental assessment process safer, and more predictable and timely.

High quality environmental assessments are also indicative of an efficient process. Bill C-9 contains several measures that will ensure that this is always so under the amended Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency will be required to establish and lead a quality assurance program. This is a very important initiative because more than 40 Crown corporations will soon be joining the 30 government departments, councils and agencies that currently enforce the act.

[*English*]

The success of the renewed process would depend, in a large part, on steps that we are taking to increase transparency and to promote public participation.

In this regard, Bill C-9 would require the establishment of a government-wide Internet site of project information. The site would include a notice at the start of each assessment. The Internet site would be complemented by the retention of the current system of project files that provide convenient public access to all documents associated with an environmental assessment.

I set three goals in my March 2001 report to Parliament on the five year review of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

First, a renewed federal assessment process that brings a greater measure of certainty, predictability and timeliness of all participants.

Government Orders

Second, the renewed process must produce high-quality environmental assessments that contribute to better decisions in support of sustainable development.

Third, the process must provide opportunities for meaningful public participation.

I am convinced that the improvements in Bill C-9 will lead to the achievement of those goals.

The Government of Canada will be investing some \$51 million over the next five years to implement the renewed act. This new funding and the legislative changes made by Bill C-9 will ensure that decision makers, both inside and outside the government, have better information about the environmental effects of proposed projects. Better information will mean better decisions that promote progress on the environmental priorities, including clean air, clean water, protection of Canada's biodiversity and climate change.

May I once again congratulate the members from all parties who took part in the diligent work done by the committee over the past year to improve Bill C-9.

I encourage the House to support passage of this important legislation, designed to ensure that new development projects are thoroughly examined in the planning stage to prevent harm to the environment and to help assure a more sustainable future for Canada.

• (1545)

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today for the third reading on Bill C-9, an act to amend the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act or CEAA. Although far from perfect, the Canadian Alliance will be supporting this legislation which is the result of a mandatory five year review of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act itself.

Because the five year review did not allow full inspection of the original act, the bill in many ways is incomplete. This is regrettable and will need to be addressed at the next mandatory review seven years from now.

One of the chief features of Bill C-9 is the creation of the Canadian environmental assessment registry. The registry will provide more public access to documents, surrounding a project through an online database. A coordinator position has been created to administer this registry and coordinate the process.

I am pleased with some of the positives achieved at committee with respect to Bill C-9. These include new scoping provisions that can begin before a project is approved. Providing details on the scope of the project will increase transparency and trust between groups that have traditionally clashed over environmental issues.

The creation of an online registry should also provide more and better information. The Canadian Alliance fought hard to ensure that those without Internet access could still obtain information they sought.

Most important though, the entire act will be reviewed in seven years by a parliamentary committee. It is crucial that the next review take the process out of the hands of cabinet, which prevented a number of sections of CEAA not to be opened for political reasons.

When I speak about this review, it was a ministerial review and they very tightly controlled which aspects of the act could be reviewed under the scoping provisions. Fortunately we were able to get an amendment through where the next review would be a parliamentary review. It will be up to the purview of the committee itself. It will be the master of that review and will decide what should be opened. I think that will be a much better review seven years from now.

However there were some flaws which we also identified in Bill C-9 and I would like to talk about those for a few minutes.

The minister said that one of the positives of this act was that CEAA would now extend to some 40 crown corporations. I do not believe that is quite accurate, maybe on the face of it, but I will explain it in more details because this is the exact provision that we fought for in committee.

We felt that crown corporations operating inside Canada should follow the same rules, the Canadian environmental assessment rules, as every other business or company or anybody who fell under this act. Of course they have been exempted.

The government once again exempted many crown corporations from coverage under CEAA. Crown corporations will be allowed three years to create separate regulations governing environmental assessment. Certainly there are crown corporations that need special circumstances but these agencies are relatively few in number. The government had five years to prepare a list in which agencies should be exempted yet this was never done. We have to ask the question.

Under the new legislation, and this is where the government has sort of compromised the crown corporations, crown corporations that want to be exempted under the act have three years to prepare their own environmental assessment process. If they do not, then they will be bound by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. We would have argued that they should not have even had that much latitude, that operating inside Canada they should still have been compelled the same as everybody else. However that is another question for another day and one which hopefully will be addressed when the review is done.

Another concern is that Bill C-9 allows too much authority to the minister to seek further consultation before he or she issues a decision statement. This provision is subject to abuse. When a project becomes politically sensitive, the minister could delay making a decision which to this side of the House represents an abuse of process. Again, while we are not suggesting it is, the potential is there for that to happen. We thought it would have been a much stronger bill if that loophole had been closed.

Another weak area is that the municipal land use authorities should have had equal input into the process as first nations bands. This amendment was defeated by the government. Municipal governments could be affected by federal projects near or in their jurisdictions. They should have an equal right to express these concerns within the assessment process. Sadly, they have been excluded. Again, we did not agree with that as well

Government Orders

• (1550)

Despite these concerns the Canadian Alliance recognizes that on balance these improvements would actually help the process and provide better clarity to what exists now in Bill C-9 and other areas. As steps toward a single window of approval process with meaningful penalties are being made, we should not refuse them. Between now and the next review of CEAA, we will have an opportunity to see how these changes will affect environmental assessment in Canada. At that time we can take the next step and improve upon the process.

Environmental protection and the needs of industry must be meshed and both viewpoints need to be considered in this process. Our support for Bill C-9 is not without reservation. We will be watching for the government to make CEAA work much more effectively in the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today at this stage of the consideration of Bill C-9, to amend the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, or CEAA.

We have worked very hard and with a great deal of goodwill, both in this House and in committee, to amend this bill to ensure it meets the historical demands of Quebec with respect to environmental assessment.

This is done in committee by trying to make changes to both the bill's preamble and its essential clauses, to achieve greater cooperation and collaboration, as indicated; that is what is sought by the accord on environmental harmonization, which Quebec has not signed.

Quebec has not signed this accord on environmental harmonization, and we should recall what Quebec said at the time, which was, "We will not endorse this accord as long as we do not have the assurance that legislatively, our environmental process and legislation will be respected when, for example, projects are carried out in our jurisdiction".

That is what was said at the time, and I remember this was what Minister Bégin or Minister Cliche was saying when I was elected in 1997. This is also the wish historically expressed by every previous government, whether PQ or Liberal. I will come back later to the commitments the Liberal Party of Quebec made during the last campaign in Quebec concerning environmental assessments and the demands of the current Government of Quebec in terms of environmental assessment process. That is our position, and it is not that we do not want projects carried out within Quebec's jurisdiction not to be subject to an environmental assessment, far from it.

The first bill on this topic, Bill C-78, was introduced on June 18, 1990. A bill respecting environmental assessment was first introduced in 1990, while in Quebec an environmental assessment process was established back in 1975. In Quebec, we developed our own environmental assessment system by incorporating it in the Environment Quality Act in 1978. Well before 1990, some 12 years before the first federal environmental assessment bill was intro-

duced, Quebec was already putting in place its own environmental assessment mechanisms and process.

This shows then that, when it comes to the environment, particularly environmental impact assessment of projects within Quebec, Quebec has already demonstrated its leadership.

By 1978, Quebec had set up its environmental impact assessment system, and two years later, it created the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE) in Quebec. Even Canadian environmental groups have told us that the BAPE is doing excellent work. This office provides for public participation and much greater transparency and has reduced delays in getting an environmental impact assessment. In short, it ensures that proper assessments are done, while making sure that some projects are also cost effective, for example, some hydroelectric projects. So, by 1980, Quebec had created the BAPE.

• (1555)

By 1990, when Bill C-78, the first bill on environmental procedure in Quebec was tabled, Quebec and Robert Bourassa's Liberal government joined forces, and the Minister of the Environment, Pierre Paradis, wrote a letter to the federal Minister of the Environment, Jean J. Charest.

I should first talk about the time that Pierre Paradis, in a letter to Robert René de Cotret, indicated that it was essential for Bill C-78 to introduce some flexibility into Quebec's process and avoid any duplication. At the time, Quebec asked that this be ensured. However, the federal government refused to make the changes to Bill C-78 that the Quebec government was requesting.

On December 17, 1990, that same Minister of the Environment for Quebec, Pierre Paradis, wrote to Jean Charest, federal Minister of the Environment, to tell him that it could clearly be demonstrated that the bill infringed on Quebec's areas of jurisdiction. This was a clear indication that the federal government was meddling in Quebec's areas of jurisdiction.

Through all these processes, it seemed clear to me at the time that Quebec had a unanimous position on this issue. In fact, the environment minister of the day expressed it in a letter. On June 16, 1992, Pierre Paradis even made representations before the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources to indicate the impact that the environmental assessment process could have on the expertise that Quebec had developed and the experience that it had gained. But the government refused to listen to reason.

Seeing that the federal government was refusing to recognize Quebec's expertise and the legitimate demands of the Bourassa government, on March 18, 1992, the National Assembly of Quebec passed a unanimous resolution and a unanimous motion calling on the federal government to suspend its procedures.

In 1992, under the premiership of Robert Bourassa, both PQ members and Liberal members passed a unanimous motion voicing strong disapproval of the federal government's bill, an act to establish a federal environmental assessment process, because it went against Quebec's best interests. The assembly was therefore opposed to the federal Parliament passing the bill.

Government Orders

This shows that it was not only the Bourassa government that expressed its opposition to the process that was being put in place, and which is being amended today, but the whole National Assembly.

We must remember these historic moments. It is important to remember what we, in Quebec, thought at the time to try to understand the impact that the existing legislation, which we want to amend today, has had on us.

Bill C-78 became Bill C-13, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. I have here documents from 1992 where the Government of Quebec was saying, with regard to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, and I quote:

There is indeed a risk that the latter will constantly be duplicated, disputed or subordinated to the application of the federal process. Yet, the Quebec procedure has been well established for ten years already; it is well known by the general public and the promoters from Quebec; and it has proven itself.

The Government of Quebec added that the areas where the federal authority can get involved are somewhat limitless.

• (1600)

Therefore, in the view of the Government of Quebec of the time, the scope of this Canadian Environmental Assessment Act was limitless, given all of the provisions the bill contained to force obligatory reviews of projects by the federal authority.

That was our view, in Quebec, of Bill C-13, which became the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, which we are amending today.

I will come back later to whether the concerns of the Government of Quebec were justified. I will refer to the Toulnostouc hydroelectric project, on the North Shore, which my colleague has seen postponed. This is a hydroelectric project, not a gas pipeline or an oil project. This hydroelectric project, which would help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, was postponed because of overlap and a federal environmental process that confirmed the conclusions already reached by Quebec's Bureau des audiences publiques sur l'environnement. I will come back to this later.

In its past claims, Quebec said that it was important that there be an acknowledgment. Such was also the view of Alberta, to acknowledge Justice La Forest's Supreme Court decision in the Oldman case. This ruling set out and recognized the federal government's jurisdiction for undertaking environmental assessments of projects for which a federal decision is required. Those words need to be stressed, "where federal participation is required".

Justice La Forest also added something in his decision that clarifies the issue of the federal government's real powers. He stated that "the Guidelines Order cannot be used as a colourable device to invade areas of provincial jurisdiction which are unconnected to the relevant heads of federal power" by the federal department or the board.

Therefore, Justice La Forest set limits on the federal government's ability to intervene on environmental matters. He recognizes, of course, that the federal government has discretionary powers, given that it is a shared jurisdiction. However, he clearly states that this power is not limitless. This needs to be acknowledged.

At the time, Quebec was also worried that this environmental assessment process would create duplication. It did say that if Bill C-13 was passed as written—and I want to stress this because it is the basic legislation that we are amending here today—it would mean submitting for federal evaluation many environmental projects that had already gone through Quebec's environmental impact examination and assessment procedure. This situation would therefore create a serious duplication problem in Quebec.

At the time, we feared that the federal environmental assessment process would create duplication. It is not that we do not want some projects to go through the environmental assessment procedure. In fact, we would like an environmental assessment to be done on as many projects as possible. That is why we created, in 1980, our very own Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement which ensures that an in-depth environmental assessment is carried out if requested by citizens.

In many ways and quite often, Quebec's environmental assessment process is more thorough than the federal process. Under the federal scheme, only 1% of all projects go through some in-depth analysis, which is not the case in Quebec. Also, Quebec's process is transparent and allows every citizen who so wishes—as long as the request for an environmental assessment is not far-fetched—to obtain consultations, hearings and environmental assessments within a reasonable time frame. Assessments are not done only on projects carried out in a specific area. BAPE can also assess industrial and farming projects, like pig farms, if they are believed to have some environmental impact.

• (1605)

The scope of Quebec's BAPE extends to diverse issues, and not only to specific projects from developers, something that is not possible in the federal process which we enacted a few years ago and which we are amending today.

Therefore, we must recognize the significance of the Quebec process. I remind members that Quebec did not sign the Accord on Environmental Harmonization because it was afraid at that time that the accord was one of those pieces of legislation that are not really intended to improve cooperation. As people often say, with an accord or a bill like that, you do not need to be married. Under these circumstances, we do not want to be partners.

True partnership involves cooperation. What we are hearing today is a request that Quebec become a partner, that Quebec cooperate, but one of the partners will be more equal than the other. It is often said that everyone is equal, but in reality, in the federal system as it now exists, one partner is more equal than the other. That is the federal government, because it has assumed this discretionary power. I will come back to this point later. The government will now let the minister increase his discretionary power, and that is totally unacceptable.

Moreover, as was said at the time of Bill C-13, the Government of Quebec documents submitted to a Senate committee clearly indicated, and here I quote the words of the duly elected Government of Quebec in 1992:

Government Orders

We fail to see why the Government of Quebec should be interested in having the implementation of these elements of the federal environmental assessment process delegated to it, when the procedure Quebec has developed in recent years has been recognized as the most effective in the world.

Not only do we say so, but others say so, too. Why destroy something that is working well? If Quebec were not proactive in environmental assessment, then perhaps I could understand why the Canadian government would want to have a federal procedure, because Quebec was weak in environmental assessment. But why, when the Quebec procedure is recognized, does the government want to create duplicate procedures?

It is because of the will of an increasingly centralizing government in Ottawa, the same government that preaches cooperation and harmonization. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot say that you want cooperation and then bring in bills that increase centralization.

Consistency is the only way to go in politics, and it is the only way people will again have faith in the political system. Double talk is indeed the kind of approach and vision that makes voters in Quebec and Canada lose interest. In my view, consistency is fundamental.

As I often said, Quebec voiced its opposition to the bill for several reasons. Why? Because, among other things, there are several elements in the environmental assessment process that depend, for the most part, on the scope and complexity of the probable effects of a project.

The main tool is screening, which applies to 99% of assessed projects. Only 1% of projects, as I said before, are subject to a comprehensive study.

• (1610)

Why then is Quebec's process, which allows for a comprehensive study, not properly recognized? This is what I do not understand. Since the Quebec's process allows for a comprehensive study, why does the federal government want to have a better environmental assessment? They are not taking full advantage of a process that allows for comprehensive studies. Instead, they are consolidating the legislation.

There is another fundamental problem. The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act favours self-assessment in that the federal government assesses its own projects. Unlike Quebec, where we have the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement which is responsible for environmental assessments, under Canadian law it is often the departments that do their own assessment. So they are both judge and jury. It is as if the oil industry or an industrial developer were told, "You will conduct your own environmental assessment". What would happen? It would result in biases. What we really need is not a self-assessment process but a truly independent process as afforded by Quebec's Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement.

Finally, public hearings were held between January and March 2000. Over 1,200 stakeholders took part. A parallel consultation process was held by the first nations organizations. But Quebec did not take part in these discussion and did not make

any comments, because the bill denies Quebec's traditional demands.

This legislation has resulted in 5,500 to 6,000 environmental impact assessments per year. This is a lot. It is important to remember that these assessments are being done by the departments responsible for the projects and not by the agency. The agency could not, in any case, handle such a high volume.

We have some criticisms of several sections of Bill C-9. First, section 22 clearly gives the federal government greater authority to interfere in one of Quebec's jurisdictions. By adding "of the opinion", the bill gives the minister discretionary power. So, the minister has the discretion to intervene.

Second, in clause 8, the whole part about the federal environmental assessment coordinator clearly shows that the federal government wants to interfere in Quebec's process. The federal government has to create this position because it intends to operate in one of Quebec's jurisdictions. If it stayed in its own jurisdiction, it would not need to do this.

Quebec is not opposed to a federal environmental assessment process, just as it did not oppose the federal species at risk legislation. Why was it not opposed to such legislation? Because, since 1990, Quebec has its own such legislation. It took the federal government 13 years to decide to adopt federal species at risk legislation and, 13 years later, we are being told that the federal legislation might eliminate Quebec's process and legislation.

I do not get it. There are members across the way who voted for this threatened species act when they were in Quebec in 1990. As we consider Bill C-9, to amend the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and allow the federal process to apply in Quebec, I have a hard time understanding how some members opposite who defended and adopted the Quebec process just a few years ago can now support this bill. I do not understand this double talk. They cannot have it both ways.

• (1615)

One cannot endorse a bill providing for environmental assessments in Quebec and, 15 years later, support a bill allegedly designed to improve, from a federal point of view, the current legislation and the original legislation.

As far as we are concerned, the position of federal coordinator reflects the federal government's desire to interfere in the process established in Quebec. As I said, we objected to that, and so did the Government of Quebec. Why? Because we have our own Bureau des audiences publiques sur l'environnement.

I want to stress that this widely recognized process is more transparent when it comes to public participation. It is at arm's length as compared to the federal government's self-assessment approach, which I described earlier, whereby departments assess their own projects.

The process in Quebec is more at arm's length, as compared to that approach. It excludes fewer projects, thus ensuring more comprehensive protection of the environment. It is less complex than the federal process. It is also more uniform, hence more predictable, since it comes under just one entity instead of various federal departments.

Finally, it provides clearly set time limits, contrary to the federal process, which never gives any precise time limit.

When we look at the Quebec process, and analyse its performance record, including the latest report of the Bureau des audiences publiques sur l'environnement for 2000-01, which I have recently examined, we might conclude that Quebeckers are finding that the process in Quebec is not working; that it is time for a double safety net; that the Bureau des audiences publiques sur l'environnement is not, Quebeckers feel, carrying out sufficiently independent assessments; that it is time then for the federal level to step in and patch up the Quebec process; that, basically, the Quebec process needs to be consolidated because it is no good.

Yet polls have been carried out in connection with the Bureau des audiences publiques sur l'environnement, because it is important to examine what is being done, in order to see whether it is appreciated and whether the process is a good one. Most poll subjects who attended a public information session by the BAPE, 91% in fact, found its presentation appropriate. As well, 92% found the various means used to inform and consult the public on a project useful.

I am not sure that the public would really find the federal process satisfactory, when only 1% of projects are subjected to a comprehensive study. I would be curious to find out. I would be pleased to carry out a poll of those who have used the federal process, and this is what I would ask, "Are you happy that only 1% of projects were subjected to a comprehensive study? That 99% were subjected to screening only. Do you agree with this? Do you feel the process is transparent? Do you think the federal self-assessment process is a good one?" I am sure that the results would not be the same.

Most of the people polled seemed satisfied with the process in Quebec. Most of them, 86%, felt that the commission lets them ask all relevant questions within a reasonable time limit. The first part of the public hearing makes it possible for them to gain clear and precise information on the impact of projects. Eighty-eight per cent of them say this is the case. For each of these two elements, 10% report that they are dissatisfied.

However, the proportion of those who are dissatisfied is higher with regard to the time provided for preparing briefs or oral presentations. It is 21%. Therefore, even though 21% of those polled expressed dissatisfaction in terms of the time provided for preparing briefs under the Quebec process, close to 80% are indeed satisfied.

Finally, satisfaction with regard to the inquiry and public hearing process is such that two out of five respondents think that it does not need any specific improvements.

●(1620)

Eight respondents out of ten, or 79%, totally or generally agree that the format and structure of the report make it easy to read, whereas 8% think the opposite.

Government Orders

I insist on these assessments, on these comprehensive studies as opposed to screenings—it is the terminology used by the federal government. In Quebec, they are called inquiries.

The annual number of public information and consultation mandates has gone from 15 in the 1980s, when the process was created, to 18 in the 1990s and to 25 in 2001-02. The average annual number of inquiry, public hearing and mediation mandates has also increased, going from 3 in the 1980s, to 7 in the 1990s and to 12 in 2001-02. There is also a steady increase in the number of mandate-days for information, inquiry and mediation periods, that number jumping from 1,543 in 1998 to 2,622 in 2001-02.

It seems clear to me that the federal government is trying to impose its process on Quebec when Quebec's own process is working well. This is my opinion and also one that has been widely expressed.

I also have to say that in committee we tried to have included in the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, as it is in Quebec's environment quality act, Quebec Crees' special status recognized under article 22 of the James Bay Convention that provides for a distinct environmental assessment process and system. That was one of the major demands of the Grand Council of the Crees, namely granting them this special status and recognizing article 22 of the convention.

The federal government turned us down. We tried several times both within the bill before us now and in committee—the issue of the environmental assessment was also reviewed in committee—I have been trying and I am still trying to have the James Bay Convention, especially article 22 on environmental assessment, recognized by the legislation and the federal government. Unfortunately, it is turning a deaf ear to us.

Finally, I talked about the 1990s, under the government of Robert Bourassa, and I also talked about the PQ government from 1994 until very recently. In a few days, we will vote on Bill C-9 at third reading. It is important to try to understand and see whether the new Quebec government has a different vision in this regard.

I believe we must take stock and try to understand what this legitimate new government, recently elected in Quebec, will favour and ask for. Will it back down on Quebec traditional demands? It might, and then again, it might not. We know very little since the environment minister was appointed just yesterday.

The only indication we have comes from the Quebec Liberal Party election platform.

●(1625)

The proposal from their document on energy says:

In order to provide for Quebeckers' electricity needs in the near future, we plan to reduce construction delays for hydroelectric projects by concluding a timely agreement with federal authorities to harmonize the environmental assessment process, or even delegate it to Quebec.

Government Orders

What the Government of Quebec wants is to reduce the waiting period when it comes to hydroelectric projects.

The past is an indication of what the future holds in store. Look at what this government has done with the environmental assessment process in the Toulnostouc project on the North Shore. It is important to remember that the interference of the federal government in the hydroelectric generating station on the Toulnostouc River in 2001 caused delays of several months on this key project for the region.

After reviewing the environmental assessment of the project, after public consultations in Baie-Comeau and Betsiamites, after 13 hearings involving some 650 people with 31 briefs having been presented, the BAPE gave the project its approval in June 2001. This hydroelectric power plant was going to generate employment for 800 people per year.

The federal government decided to enforce the federal process, skeptical of the BAPE's environmental assessment under Quebec's system, thereby delaying a sustainable development project for Canada, and also violating the principles of sustainable development, under which the economy, the environment and society are equally important. I think that the proposal of the current Liberal government, to have environmental reviews delegated to Quebec, is completely warranted.

I find this reassuring and I have the following observation. We have always and often been reproached here in the House for not understanding anything. The Government of Quebec was often reproached for not understanding the situation and for not wanting to cooperate or harmonize environmental measures, because it was a PQ government, sovereignist and separatist—as the members opposite call us. Now, we can see that there was not just the issue of the fiscal imbalance that the Government of Quebec could not agree on. The current Liberal government of Quebec does not agree on this issue either.

I am convinced that when the newly elected government in the National Assembly sees this bill and when it studies and evaluates these major amendments, it will be consistent with Robert Bourassa's position in 1992 and support the drive to patriate and have one single environmental review process for all projects. In the end, I am convinced that the new government will remain faithful to Quebec's past claims and to the best interests of Quebec, as all of the Governments of Quebec have done for decades.

• (1630)

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on third reading of Bill C-9 which is a bill to amend the existing environmental assessment act.

In terms of understanding the context we need to have a bit of a review of the history of environmental assessment in Canada. That really began in the early 1970s by way of orders in council.

In 1973 the initial stage had no statutory authority, but over a period of the next 10 to 11 years we evolved into various pieces of legislation that ultimately resulted in the issuance of what were called environmental assessment and review guidelines and an order was issued pursuant to the Department of the Environment Act in 1984. The initial stages of the process were in fact, interestingly,

given the sequence of what we see afterwards, determined by the government. These guidelines were not enforceable under any statute by the federal government.

Interestingly, the guidelines were being applied mostly in a voluntary manner, but then in 1989, with the Rafferty-Alameda Dam project in Saskatchewan, which was ultimately taken through the Federal Court system by environmental groups who were opposed to that project, it was determined by the court that those guidelines were enforceable.

Therefore, for the first time the government had to confront the reality that the Federal Court and ultimately the Supreme Court in a separate decision were determining that the federal government did have the legislative authority and had enforcement mechanisms available to it to apply environmental assessments in a meaningful way. It was a major step forward in the environmental assessment process in Canada.

In that period of time legislation was brought forward and ultimately passed. While that was working its way through the legislative process, the Supreme Court of Canada made a further pronouncement in this area on environmental assessments which was quite surprising to the federal government and certainly to the provinces. It was that those guidelines were, in fact, applicable to provincial projects so long as they affected federal interests. That decision was in 1992. In 1992 under the Conservative government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney legislation was passed. We had an election in 1993 and the legislation was not proclaimed by this government until 1995.

Contained in that legislation was a provision in section 72 that required a review after five years. As we heard from the minister today, the review was initiated in 1999 but did not get underway until well into 2000. Part of the process of the review was a requirement that a regulatory advisory committee be appointed.

If I can digress for a moment, it is interesting to look at what our experience was and what the regulatory advisory committee and the minister were confronted with. I pulled out a 12 month period of assessments for 2000-01. During that period of time there were 6,147 projects initiated that would have required an assessment.

Under the legislation there are various forms of assessments. The basic ones that we have referred to are screenings, comprehensive studies, and panel reviews.

The screenings are a summary process from within the department that is responsible for the project. Of those 6,147 that year, only one panel review was ordered. There were eight comprehensive studies. That leaves 6,138 that were done by the summary screening, a very small percentage.

• (1635)

The eight comprehensive studies require a more detailed review of the project. When that review is completed it is submitted to the minister, who then causes it to be published and gives interested parts of the community an opportunity to respond. Then ultimately the minister makes the decision. I should point out that there is no need for the minister to give any reasons or explanations for the decision made.

Government Orders

The members of the panel review on the other hand are appointed by the minister and conduct what everybody would see as an administrative tribunal type of process resulting in recommendations with explanations and reasoning supplied to the minister, who again ultimately makes the decision. That was the process. As I indicated, in that period of time there were few panel reviews and few comprehensive studies.

Over the entire period of the legislation, up to the time the review got to the environment committee, there were slightly less than 40,000 projects reviewed. Of that number there were nine panel reviews, less than 100 comprehensive studies, and there are three panel reviews still in progress.

I would like to note some of the reviews that were conducted. One of them, and the minister mentioned it today, was the Voisey's Bay project. The Sable Gas projects were reviewed. The Sunshine Ski Development in Alberta and the Canadian Millennium Pipeline project in Ontario were reviewed as were a number of other ones, all quite significant projects. However, what that list does not say is that there were also a large number of other significant projects that either did not get a comprehensive study, certainly did not get a panel review, and almost all of which went through the basic screening.

The one that I always point to in terms of its magnitude is the one project that would allow for the storage of radioactive waste on the Bruce Peninsula. When completed, this will be the biggest site in the world for storage of radioactive waste. That project did not require a panel review or a comprehensive study review. It simply went through one of those basic screenings.

The other project that I tend to mention was in Manitoba and actually crosses over into Saskatchewan. It was a forestry project that required a number of bridges and dams to be built that would have allowed the project proponent to develop the forestry industry in that region. Geographically that was a land surface that was to be significantly impacted from an environmental standpoint and was equal to almost 25% of the province of Manitoba. That project did not require, under the discretionary clause of the minister, a panel review or a comprehensive study review. There are lists that are much longer than the two that I have mentioned.

Where we are at when this legislation got to the regulatory advisory committee, or RAC, is that type of setting: 40,000 projects; 12 panel reviews, only 9 of which had been conducted; and less than 100 comprehensive studies. The proposed legislation, however, that they were given at that point was extremely narrow. It really did very little to allow them to make strong, comprehensive recommendations.

• (1640)

In addition to the framework within which it was forced to work, the committee did make a number of recommendations within that framework and a number of those were not even accepted by the department when the bill finally got to the House at first and second reading. It then worked its way through committee, but in confronting it, we in the NDP had three tests that we applied to it.

We asked whether it went far enough to protect our environment, and whether it strengthened or weakened the legislation. We

concluded that overall, in spite of some improvements, it weakened the legislation.

The second criteria we applied was the process itself. Bill C-9 is designed to streamline and speed up the environmental assessment process. There are some good arguments as to why that should occur, but the process which would be instituted by this bill is designed entirely to benefit the proponents and developers of these projects, and not to protect the environment and the public.

The third assessment that we applied to the bill was whether it strengthened the ability—and we are talking here of transparency—for people, community members, NGOs, and sectoral interests to deal with the process. Was it more transparent and accountable? Was it more accessible for groups who may wish to know about the project and oppose it if they could get sufficient information as to its scope?

On the basis of all three criteria, this bill failed. As a result we will be opposing the bill when it comes for a vote at third reading.

The other point I would like to make is that there were a good number of attempts at amendments in committee. For example, the NDP proposed 50-some amendments and all the opposition parties proposed amendments, very few of which got through. The point I would make in this regard is that the bill is extremely limited. It does not deal with the basic problem that our environmental assessment process in this country is inadequate. The bill is about tinkering and a little fine-tuning.

One of the major amendments we wanted to deal with dealt with the issue of transparency and accountability. The law in the bill as it stands now would have no enforcement provisions in it. Bill C-9 would not have any changes in the law in that regard.

There were a number of amendments from the various opposition parties with regard to that issue. It was not just about enforcement. Let me use one example. One of the problems we often run into is that a proponent will actually begin work on a project. There is little that the government agency can do to stop that. It can issue some orders in the extreme, but it has no ability to enforce those orders.

We had made a number of proposals in that regard because it is a serious issue. Often, if the work is initiated before approval is given under the assessment process, it becomes a fait accompli. There is nothing that the agency can do but allow the project to go ahead because the trees have been cut down and damage already has been done to the environment, as well as any number of other consequences over which we have no way of penalizing the proponent who has broken the legislation. There is no way of enforcing the provisions of the legislation.

Government Orders

•(1645)

The other point though and again there were a number of amendments on this, was also requiring the government departments to comply with the legislation. We had repeated examples of the legislation being skirted, not being fully applied. Access to documentation was not given in compliance with either the letter or the spirit of the legislation. Again, there is no provision in the legislation to deal with that. The law in effect at this point does not require either enforcement or compliance and the amendments proposed to Bill C-9 will not require that enforcement in compliance. It is just one example of where the bill is so lacking.

The additional point I would like to make and I want to note this, is there are some positives in this but they have not been carried far enough. Again the minister in addressing third reading today mentioned extending the provisions of the bill to crown corporations. Unfortunately, that is not going to occur right away. Crown corporations are going to continue to be exempt for another three years once the legislation is passed.

The coordination that is being planned under this legislation in light of first nations environmental assessments is not clear enough. It was an attempt but it is not clear enough to really make that a coordinated effort between this level of government and first nations.

In summary, we have gone through almost exactly 30 years of environmental assessment at the federal level in this country. We were beginning to develop through guidelines in almost precedents the ability to begin to deal realistically and effectively with environmental assessments. The legislation in 1992 which finally became proclaimed in 1995, was actually a step backward when we look at what happened.

I want to digress for a moment in my summary. One of the things we have to appreciate is that the legislation because it had so few panel reviews was not able to develop a body of law. I do not mean rigid precedents as we have in some of our court systems but a general body of law that would have had experts in the area making decisions and recommendations to the minister but have those in writing as guidelines for the various departments which apply this legislation.

We do not have that. We have had nine reports and we are waiting for three more. We badly need to develop those guidelines so that individual members of the bureaucracy across this country will have a much clearer picture of what they are supposed to do when they are doing those basic screenings. We do not have that. I have to say we are not going to get this in this legislation, Bill C-9.

This is going to require, as Bill C-9 does, a further review. One can only hope that at that time the review will be more meaningful, that it will in fact encompass the whole of the legislation. I can forecast that we will see very few changes from the process that we have seen under the existing law. In three and five years from now, we will have to go back and do this properly and do a full review and get much more meaningful legislation.

In the interim we will obviously as a party be monitoring this but we will be voting against this legislation when it comes to third reading.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): 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 Saint-Jean, Highway Infrastructure; and the hon. member for Québec, Canadian Television Fund.

•(1650)

[English]

Mr. John Herron (Fundy—Royal, PC): Madam Speaker, in 1994 the then minister of the environment and deputy prime minister moved second reading of a bill known as the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. She described the legislation as “one of the most outstanding environmental acts in the world. With the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and its important amendments, Canada will be a world leader in environmental thinking and practice”.

As Environmental Defence Canada, a national organization that was founded in 1984 and dedicated to helping Canadians protect the environment, noted in its submission to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development, there were very high hopes for the future of environmental assessment when CEAA was proclaimed in force in 1995. It noted:

We supported its promises of increased access to information, increased public participation, and access to participant funding for citizens to become involved in panel reviews of environmental assessments.

More than five years later, Environmental Defence Canada was forced to conclude that CEAA was a staggering failure across Canada. Others who testified before the committee shared this view.

We heard from citizens about difficulties in even getting major projects reviewed under CEAA. The Coalition of Concerned Citizens of Caledon, consisting of more than 2,500 members, has been fighting to convince the Department of Fisheries and Oceans since 1998 to apply CEAA to a proposed rock quarry project that has a planned extraction rate of up to 2.5 million tonnes of aggregate per year.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has acknowledged that this project will in fact result in the destruction of fish habitat unless effective mitigation measures are employed. The question is whether such effective mitigation measures are even possible in the first place.

Instead of commencing a comprehensive study pursuant to the regulations, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has chosen to ignore the CEAA requirement that environmental assessment of a project be conducted as early as practicable in the planning stages of the project. Such a decision also flies in the face of the so-called CEAA coordination regulation providing that where a federal authority such as DFO receives a project description, it shall within 30 days of receipt of the information determine whether there should be an environmental assessment of the project.

Officials advised us that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans does not in fact trigger any environmental assessment of a project until after: one, it has received complete information on possible measures to prevent or mitigate the effects on fish habitat; and two, it has concluded that prevention and mitigation will not work.

Government Orders

As the coalition pointed out, this Department of Fisheries and Oceans practice is duplicative and inefficient. It makes no sense to assess mitigation options internally in order to determine that mitigation will not work and then trigger an environmental assessment process to review and study those same mitigation options. The current bill does nothing to address this triggering problem under the fisheries act.

We heard a number of witnesses complain about CEAA's failure to ensure that people get timely access to information. In particular, John Lavoie, a trapper living and working northeast of Thunder Bay, took the time to tell us about his difficulties in obtaining records relating to a CEAA screening of a proposed hydroelectric project. Despite over 20 letters and telephone calls to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, he did not receive any records prior to the conclusion of the assessment, the issuance of the authorization or the start of the construction.

Mr. Lavoie made the not unreasonable suggestion that a responsible authority must give the public an opportunity, just an opportunity, to examine and comment on a screening report and related documents upon the receipt of a written request for participation. I do not think that is unreasonable. The government has ignored this recommendation and we are sure to see more people frustrated by not getting the right documents at the right time.

The most distressing testimony and the clearest signal of CEAA's failure came from Norman de la Chevrotière, president of the Inverhuron and District Ratepayers Association. He told us about the association's fight to get a CEAA panel review of the world's largest above ground, high level radioactive waste storage site at the Bruce nuclear facility. He stated that the federal Minister of the Environment approved the project without a panel review, even though the association and others raised serious concerns about the health effects caused by the existing and future radiation releases at the site.

Mr. de la Chevrotière described it this way:

So when it came time to participate in the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act process, we thought this is a slam dunk. If anything deserves a panel review, this has got to be it. But we better not be complacent, we better participate in the process. We spent thousands upon thousands of dollars of our own money because we had no access to funding. We hired experts who uncovered a number of apparent inadequacies and uncertainties.

We weren't the only ones who were concerned: the local MP [the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound]; the local Medical Officer of Health; the Canadian Federation of Agriculture; Chippewas of Nawash; [and others]. It was overwhelming public concern in terms of asking for what we thought was something very reasonable, an independent and expert assessment. We didn't get it.

Later, Mr. de la Chevrotière concluded with the following plea:

If the world's largest nuclear waste storage facility, housing the most toxic and deadliest of all industrial waste products does not merit a panel review, what would?

I am here imploring this committee; I am begging this committee to please make changes to the act so no other citizen's group has to go through the ordeal that we went through. Projects of this scope and magnitude should be subject to a panel review and it should be mandatory. All relevant information has to be on the public record, and it should be guaranteed. I am asking this committee to please do that.

Put bluntly, we failed Mr. de la Chevrotière. The minister failed this citizen's group.

We could not help him because the committee was constrained from the outset to examining only those sections identified in Bill

C-9. This constraint was justified on the basis that only the Minister of the Environment could dictate the scope of the review and changes to CEAA as set out in the legislative review section. Not surprisingly, the minister missed the concerns raised by people such as Mr. de la Chevrotière and declared CEAA to be fundamentally sound.

• (1655)

In fact, it is truly amazing that the Minister of the Environment could declare in his report that panel review is the core strength of the environmental assessment act. Yet he failed to appreciate that out of 30,000 screenings only one has been referred to a panel on the basis that significant adverse environmental effects were identified or that there was uncertainty about the significance of such effects.

If this is the core strength or the spine of the act, then we can only conclude that the environmental assessment act we have today is a spineless regime. As I will discuss in a few minutes, proposed government amendments will further erode opportunities for panel reviews. Any trace amounts of a spine in CEAA will likely vanish.

We were also prevented from seriously examining the core structures and features of CEAA to determine their effectiveness. For example, we had to ignore the issue of self-assessments, even though we were advised as a committee by some witnesses that an effective regime could not exist where departments conduct assessments and in fact grant the approvals of those very same projects.

We also had to pass on providing a definition of what a significant adverse environmental effect is in the first place. Second, we had to pass on ensuring assessment of cumulative effects, particularly on a regional basis were not taken into account. Third, we had to pass on building in powers for the agency to make enforceable decisions and impose penalties for non-compliance with CEAA. Fourth, we had to pass on providing for the strategic environmental assessment of proposed policies, programs and plans.

On that last point, members may be aware that the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development has already criticized federal departments for failing to implement the environmental assessment of policies and programs as required by a 1990 cabinet directive. The followup 1999 cabinet directive also has not been applied, thus highlighting the necessity of introducing a compliance mechanism into CEAA itself.

More than one witness told us that the failure to include any enforcement provisions in CEAA renders it toothless and of little effect. CEAA is like a jellyfish of environmental assessment regimes, toothless as I said earlier, in fact spineless.

Notwithstanding the restraints on review, the committee did make some improvements to Bill C-9. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight those.

Government Orders

Government accountability has been improved with the requirement under new section 16.3 that the responsible authority must document and make available to the public its determinations with respect to screenings and comprehensive studies.

For the purposes of facilitating public access to records and providing notice of environmental assessments, there will be an expanded registry consisting of an Internet site as well as project files. Under subsection 55.1(2)(a), a notice of commencement must be posted on the Internet site within 14 days of an assessment commencing.

The committee provided additional accountability by including a paragraph, subsection 55.1(3)(e), that information included on the Internet site would have to be posted at least 30 days before any decision could be taken by a responsible authority, the minister or the agency.

The committee also fought hard to close a very glaring loophole that permitted crown corporations to avoid the necessity of conducting environmental assessments. This is what we asked the private sector to do.

While CEAA originally contemplated bringing crowns under the act pursuant to regulation, the government had failed to act except in relation to port authorities. Now in this bill, because of an amendment done by the committee, there is a statutory requirement that regulations be passed within three years bringing crown corporations under CEAA. During this period the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency has undertaken to appear before the committee to give progress reports on the development of regulations.

I am very heartened by Mr. Connelly and Ms. Thompson, who I am sure are listening very attentively to this speech and other speeches that have been made in the chamber this afternoon. I am heartened that they will be taking the time to visit us in committee to let us know how those regulations are coming along over the next three years so that we can avoid a last minute rush to put regulations in place as a result possibly of missing a deadline.

● (1700)

The committee also put in place a legislative review mechanism that would not repeat the mistake of letting the minister dictate the scope of the review. Within seven years after Bill C-9 receives royal assent, a comprehensive review of the provisions and operation of CEAA shall be undertaken by such committee of the Senate, of the House of Commons or both Houses of Parliament, as may be designated. Perhaps then, and probably only then, will we be able to adequately address the concerns that Mr. de la Chevrotiere pleaded for our committee to address.

It must also be noted that the Liberal majority on the committee did manage to block some key attempts at improving the bill itself.

Presently, under CEAA, the minister has the power to refer a project that has been subjected to a comprehensive study to a panel review. If there are further questions about a particular project after a comprehensive study has been done, the minister today has an opportunity to move it to a panel review. In fact this has happened one time before after benchmarking our 30,000 screenings. According to witnesses, this has had the effect of causing proponents

and responsible authorities to better comply with the requirements of a comprehensive study in the first place.

Now under section 21.1, once the minister refers the project to a comprehensive study, it may not, even if there are other questions down the road, subsequently be referred to a panel review. The minister has intentionally tied his hands so that he will be no longer accountable for not answering further questions. He will be able to say that his hands are tied and that he is restricted by what the act is. This is a glaring mistake. There will not be any proponent or responsible authority that would willingly conclude that a comprehensive study will not suffice.

During the course of the committee review, I introduced an amendment to provide for a panel review. Our national parks are our most valuable treasures in terms of protecting our ecological integrity and we should have a higher regime when it comes to them. I know the Minister of Canadian Heritage once shared that same opinion as well.

In the amendment I proposed that if a project might cause a significant adverse environmental effect on a park, or on a park reserve, or on wildlife that frequents such area or on the air affecting such an area, it should be reviewed by the panel review. The amendment was tailored on an undertaking that the minister publicly gave following the receipt of a report on the health of Canada's national parks. As a result, I expected this amendment would enjoy sufficient Liberal support to be passed. After all, it was a concept espoused by the Liberal Minister of Canadian Heritage. Stunningly, most Liberal members refused to assist the minister responsible and the amendment was not carried.

As with the Species at Risk Act and other environmental legislation, the government has been unable to respect and accept amendments made by the committee. However I will tip my hat because it was more constructive and more willing to do work at the report stage this time than it has in the past, by negotiating common language.

I would like to highlight one reversal that I think is a mistake. In particular the government felt the need to roll back the provision that documents be posted on the Internet at least 30 days before any decision was taken to 15 days. Provincial governments, including the government of Ernie Eves and Mike Harris, have say that 15 days is fine. I do not see why the federal government would have to go to a 15 day component.

● (1705)

Also, it is not clear what kind of information will be posted on the Internet itself other than a mere notice of commencement. In other words, the public will likely have a difficult time ascertaining what is being assessed, the scope of the assessment and other factors relating to the decision. It is hard to understand why the government will not allow citizens the opportunity to review documents on which environmental assessments are based before decisions are taken.

Given the failures of CEAA and the government imposed constraints on the review of it, the committee has been left to draft another report that addresses the major deficiencies of the current environmental assessment regime raised by witnesses and other members of the public.

Government Orders

It poses this question. Ten years on is the federal environmental assessment making a significant contribution to sustainable development and a healthy environment? The answer today is no. Canada is not a world leader in environmental assessment. The committee report that will be tabled in the House in the coming weeks we hope will address those inadequacies. After this report has been tabled and the minister considers what is in the report and we review CEAA with the mandatory review, maybe then and only then will we be able to address the concerns that have been espoused by Mr. de la Chevrotiere.

* * *

• (1710)

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in reference to the unedited copy of *Hansard* which we sometimes refer to around here as the blues. The reference today is in regard to a question from the hon. member for South Shore heard by almost all members of the House because there was subsequent laughter. It had to do with the gender of an individual.

The question that was posed said, “Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just told the House he never spoke to” and it says in the blues “Dr. Brundtland”.

Clearly everyone knows Mrs. Brundtland and everybody knows that earlier today the person was referred to as “Mr. Brundtland” which provoked the laughter in the House of Commons. The blues as I see them in front of me do not reflect that. The word “Mr.” that all of us heard is now “Dr.” and that is not what we all heard.

I hope by the time the final version of the blues appears that Mr. Speaker will have had the opportunity to review the television replay of it which I understand some staff members have just done moments ago and clearly have heard again what all of us heard before we all burst out in laughter, and it was clearly the words “Mr. Brundtland”.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, I too was in the House when the member for South Shore posed his question. Without question, the terminology, whether it be “Mr.” or “Dr.”, could well be interpreted. However the government House leader knows full well that the blues are given to individuals to make necessary changes, perhaps that have not been heard properly. As a matter of fact, I can probably come up with a number of examples of members of the government side who have obviously changed the blues previously. If the hon. House leader wishes us to present those to you, Mr. Speaker, to make your ruling, then I would be more than happy to do so.

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, there were over 200 members of Parliament in this place when the interchange took place. I would like to say that the Prime Minister did respond to the question and the Prime Minister's response would be bizarre if the wording were changed to reflect the change that has been suggested from the Tory caucus. It is an inappropriate change to make.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The Chair will take the matter into deliberation. The blues and the video will be reviewed. If changes are to be made, they will be made then.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-9, an Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity to make comments and put a question to my hon. colleague, who also sits on the Standing Committee on Environment. I really enjoyed working with him on Bill C-9.

Several non-governmental organizations have made representations on this issue. Some have approached the committee, others not. However, having had the chance to talk with some of these groups in the past, I have come to realize that many of them would like entities such as Export Development Canada to be subject to the environmental assessment process.

I know that this was one of the requests made by groups like Development and Peace and also Halifax Initiative. These groups would like Export Development Canada to be subject to the federal environmental assessment procedure.

I would like to know what my hon. colleague from the Progressive Conservative Party thinks of this suggestion and recommendation.

[English]

Mr. John Herron: Mr. Speaker, my short answer is the concept the member for Rosemont—Petite-Patrie is advocating is one that has an immense amount of merit. He is also very much aware that our committee was really restricted in terms of what members could review given that a major flaw in CEAA is that only the minister can essentially ordain what we are even allowed to study with respect to environmental assessment. We were limited to only the clauses that the minister deemed relevant to a study at this time.

I am more than amenable to adopting a regime of that nature. As he well knows, because of the scope of the act, we were limited from reviewing that type of section. It will be left to other parliamentarians to do that when they do the comprehensive review seven years from now.

• (1715)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are in the process in my area of the country of considering whether we need a third crossing for vehicles between the province of Ontario and the state of Michigan, between Canada and the United States. It is the busiest crossing area in the country and in fact in the world in terms of commercial traffic. The proposal is tentative but this crossing would involve four jurisdictions, which are Canada, the United States, Michigan and Ontario, and would have a significant impact, whether a bridge or a tunnel, on the environment.

Government Orders

My question to the member for Fundy—Royal, the environment critic for the Progressive Conservative Party, is this. We are probably talking something in the range of \$5 billion to \$15 billion in terms of construction for all aspects of this development. Would that project automatically get a panel review?

Mr. John Herron: Mr. Speaker, I am going to preface my comments by saying that I am not aware of the particulars of that project.

A panel review is supposed to be a core of fundamental strength of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act process itself. To be a core of strength, it has to be utilized once in a while. In my view that project likely has an immense amount of need to be done given the amount of traffic that occurs along that Windsor corridor. However it still does not mean that we do not have an open process where we could ensure that the public could ask those hard questions if they had some serious concerns about the proposed construction of the project itself.

I would like to add that perhaps a comprehensive study might be strong enough under the existing act. If there are serious questions and the community wants to seek an independent review from a panel perspective, under the current act the minister has the capacity to say that there are still more questions and that he will refer it to a panel review. The minister now has to say that it will be either a comprehensive study or a panel review. He has denied himself the flexibility to go both ways in that regard.

If I had to answer it, my instinct would be that there is nothing wrong with a comprehensive study if we still have the panel review in our tool kit. The minister has extracted that capacity and that is probably one of the most significant flaws of this bill that we have been asked to review.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today regarding Bill C-9, which seeks to amend the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

I spoke previously on this bill, at second reading a few days ago, and I said then that with this bill, the federal government was duplicating what we had already done very well, what we had created in Quebec. In addition to having our own environmental assessment act, we wanted to confirm everything and reassure the public by creating the BAPE, the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement, which makes it possible to assess large projects at another stage.

Before I give my opinion, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague from Rosemont—Petite-Patrie. Just now, in his 40-minute speech, he gave us an excellent picture of what is happening with this legislation. He explained why we in the Bloc Québécois are opposed to it, and why both the Government of Quebec at the time—the Parti Québécois—and the newly elected government—the Liberal Party of Quebec—have opposed it.

A unanimous resolution by the National Assembly made it clear to Ottawa that the Government of Quebec was in total disagreement with the creation of such a law. Thus, I congratulate my hon. friend and I say it could not have been expressed more clearly.

Nevertheless, I can see that the Liberal members and those from other parties may not understand Quebec's environmental procedures. At present, we are going through the environmental assessment process in my region.

After the extraordinary flooding in 1996 in the Saguenay, which has cost over a billion dollars, the Parti Québécois government of the day set up the Nicolet Commission. This commission examined everything that happened in relation to the flood and in its recommendations said that the Lac Kénogami basin had to be consolidated. Then, the government acted.

It began putting infrastructure in place, but then went even farther. After the initial steps toward correcting the problems that identified, we are now in the second phase which is the project to regularize the water levels in the Lac Kénogami watershed, and this is being done within the BAPE.

This commission is headed by a chair and members who travel to the region concerned and hold hearings. So, this commission has a maximum time period in which to consult the public and table its recommendations.

In the Saguenay, the BAPE process will last four months. There are two stages. The purpose of the first stage of the public hearing is to allow the public and the commission to ask questions about every aspect of the project.

The second stage of the public hearings, which will follow, ensures that the commission hears the public's opinion and suggestions. Any individual, group or municipality who so wishes may express a view on the project, whether in the form of a brief or oral presentation. I will give members a general overview of the project.

I hope that what happened to us will never happen again anywhere. What happened in the Saguenay during the 1996 flood was horrendous.

● (1720)

This project is to build infrastructures for regulating water levels in the Lake Kénogami drainage basin, in Ville de Saguenay. This is where the whole thing started, and we all know what happened.

The project has five parts: modernization of the spillways, work above Lake Kénogami, construction of the Rivière-des-Sables sill, and consolidation and forward management.

The first phase of the project, now underway, aims to improve existing spillways and deploy additional measuring instruments in the drainage basin. The second phase, addressed by the current environmental impact study, would include the work at the Péribonka reservoir, Lake Kénogami and Rivière-des-Sables, as well as provide for the implementation of a forward management system.

This process and Quebec's legislation show just how hard Quebec has worked. People always say that Quebec is so picky about environmental issues that it created another process to allow for public participation.

I have attended many of the hearings, and I am even going to present a brief of my views because this is in my riding. Even though this is the Quebec government, I will be presenting a brief.

This is a transparent process. It is why the statistics the member for Rosemont—Petite-Patrie was reading a while ago on public satisfaction with the environmental assessment process and the Bureau d'audiences publiques du Québec show how satisfied and reassured the public is when this whole process is followed.

Why would this government come along and duplicate what we are doing and doing well ourselves? Why spend millions of dollars to duplicate efforts in an area that is not even under their jurisdiction? There may be somewhat of a shared jurisdiction, but we do our utmost for environmental protection. What the federal government is proposing is a waste of time.

It has been months, years maybe, since the last time this was brought up in a bill. With this one, time and energy are being wasted here in Ottawa in order to duplicate what is being done so well in Quebec. I would like to ask this government to withdraw its bill and to exempt Quebec from it, because we do not need it.

Given what is going to be happening with Rivière aux Sables and Lake Kénogami, the people in my region are afraid this government will take advantage of this bill to slow down the democratic process we are engaged in.

We do not need that. We know what has to be done. We have created structures, and it was not even the Parti Québécois that did so. This dates from the time of the Bourassa government. Oddly enough, the present member for Lac-Saint-Louis was the environment minister at that time. Today, instead of objecting, he is unmoved that this Liberal government is interfering in our areas of jurisdiction—when one is the sponsor of a bill one needs to be behind it at all times. I find that curious.

I think what I have said here and to the other parties of Canada is important, and that is that the process ought to be applied in the same way where they live. What I am saying to the federal government is “Stay where you belong, look after your own areas of jurisdiction and we will keep on doing a good job. It may not be perfect, but we will keep on making improvements”.

• (1725)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): 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

• (1730)

[Translation]

FAMILY SUPPLEMENT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The hon. member for Ahuntsic, on a point of order.

Ms. Eleni Bakopanos: Mr. Speaker, I need the consent of the House to show that a number of hon. members wish to support my

Private Members' Business

motion. I therefore seek the unanimous consent of this House to add to the list other opposition members who support my motion.

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

Ms. Eleni Bakopanos (Ahuntsic, Lib.), seconded by the hon. member for Beaches—East York and the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should index the family supplement to the cost of living in the next Federal Budget.

[English]

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise before the House today to seek support for Motion No. 395, which aims to have the family supplement indexed to the cost of living in the next federal budget.

[Translation]

It is with great pleasure that I address the House today. I ask my hon. colleagues to support this motion which, in my opinion, addresses one of our main concerns in the riding of Ahuntsic, and other parts of Canada.

I have always made it my duty to help the less fortunate. I am therefore pleased that this motion is geared mainly toward the two most important and vulnerable groups in society: women and children.

[English]

Before I begin I would like to thank my hon. colleagues and other members who agreed that the hon. member second the motion. I am sorry that some of the other members who wanted to second the motion were not physically in the House to do so, but I will mention their names: the member for Beaches—East York, my good friend and colleague; the member for Vancouver East, who was not in the House unfortunately when we asked for unanimous consent; the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, thank you; and the hon. member for St. John's West, who wanted to second the motion but was not physically here. I thank them all.

I thank all my hon. colleagues who support this motion.

[Translation]

Indexing the family income supplement under the EI program is important and timely. It is important, and this motion refers to the Government of Canada action plan to help children and their families. It is timely because it has been six years since this family supplement was established. After six years, it seems appropriate to conduct a review to determine whether changes, like the introduction of indexing, are required.

[English]

What we are attempting to do is to add one more brick to the existing foundation built by the Government of Canada to help Canadian families and their children.

Private Members' Business

Allow me to begin by presenting a brief synopsis of some initiatives that the Government of Canada has undertaken to combat poverty and provide Canadian families with the necessary tools to meet their basic needs. That does not mean that we in this House have eliminated poverty. I am sure no member of Parliament is proud of the fact that we have 1.5 million children who live below the poverty line.

Since 1993, one of the principle platforms of the Government of Canada's social and economic agenda has been the support of children and families. In 2002-03 alone, federal investments in child benefits, through the national child benefit and Canada child tax benefit, amounted to about \$8.2 billion. Low income families received approximately \$5.9 billion of this sum.

This financial support clearly illustrates the Government of Canada's commitment to supporting children and families. In budget 2003 the government built on this foundation with increased support for Canadians, especially children, by, among other items and other programs, increasing the national child benefit supplement to \$965 million a year by 2007 and committing \$900 million over five years to improve early learning and child care programs and services.

I am hopeful that if our economy continues to grow and the government's budget surplus increases, we can increase more rapidly and quickly the amount of the national child tax benefit and other benefits for children.

• (1735)

[*Translation*]

The government's economic and social action plan contains more examples of initiatives, such as the national homelessness initiative, designed to help children and the most disadvantaged families. I am in a position to confirm that such initiatives contribute efficiently to the well-being of families and children.

In my riding of Ahuntsic, Café 18-30, an organization working with youth at risk, is but one example of our commitment to fighting poverty among young people and securing a good start in life for all our children.

[*English*]

The government assists Canadian families through the employment insurance program. In 1996, following extensive consultations with Canadians, the Government of Canada replaced unemployment insurance with employment insurance to reflect the changing needs of the economy, the labour market, and workers. At that time the government committed to monitoring the impact of the program on people, communities, and the economy.

As part of this reform, we introduced the family supplement to replace the unemployment insurance dependency provision. Under the previous unemployment insurance legislation, any claimants with low weekly wages could qualify for a 60% benefit rate instead of the standard 55% if they had dependents as defined under the Income Tax Act. Eligibility was based on the income of the claimant regardless of total family income or earnings of the spouse, with low income defined as average weekly earnings of less than \$408 in 1996.

Both spouses in a family meeting the criteria were eligible for the 60% benefit rate and both could receive the rate simultaneously.

[*Translation*]

However, eligibility for the employment insurance family income supplement, which replaces the unemployment insurance dependency provision, is based on family income. Only one of the spouses may receive the family income supplement for a given period. The monitoring and assessment report says that the family income supplement targets low income families more effectively than the unemployment insurance dependency provision.

The family income supplement is an additional support for employment insurance recipients who have children and whose annual family income is lower than \$25,921; it supplements the basic benefit that they receive.

[*English*]

Recipients of the family supplement get an 80% employment insurance benefit rate of their insurable earnings compared with the 55% that most claimants are paid. These same families also receive the Canada child tax benefit. The most recent statistics for 2001-02 indicate that \$175.7 million was paid in family supplement benefits to a total of approximately 187,000 recipients, of which 134,000 were women.

In addition to the regular employment insurance benefit, low income recipients with children received, on average, an additional \$44 per week. According to the 2001 Employment Insurance Monitoring and Assessment Report, nearly 11% of all EI claimants received higher weekly benefits through the family supplement. Women and youth especially benefit from the family supplement as the statistics show. Approximately two-thirds of recipients are women and 14% are youth. Women accounted for 88% of the growth in family supplement top-ups paid to sickness benefits claimants.

[*Translation*]

I just provided the House with a picture of the situation concerning the family income supplement program that shows the obvious advantages of this benefit for low income families. These families still need other support programs, and not only the supplement. However, it is a step in the right direction. I believe this is a good program. Members may therefore wonder why we are asking them to examine Motion No. 395.

• (1740)

[*English*]

I will take this opportunity to address that question. First, I would like to make clear that evidence shows that the employment insurance program is working and is providing unemployed Canadians the support they need when they need it. The commitment to monitor and, if necessary, amend the EI program was not an empty promise.

Private Members' Business

In the intervening years the government has made changes to improving the program and some of the changes came from members of Parliament from both sides of the House. We made small weeks a permanent and national feature. We enhanced parental benefits and repealed the intensity rule. We modified the clawback provisions and repealed the undeclared earnings rule.

Obviously there is more to do and we can all agree that hon. members in the House have often brought forth motions like my own and others in order to improve the program and improve the system that we have right now.

In keeping with our promise and our tradition I would ask that the government index the family supplement to inflation. There are many reasons for looking favourably upon this motion. One is that the income ceiling for receiving the family supplement has been frozen at \$25,921 since its inception in 1996. The result has been that owing to the strong labour market, earnings have increased and family supplement claims have decreased by 4.2%.

On the surface this decrease in reliance on the family supplement would seem auspicious for low income families, but in truth, the increase in earnings that would put some families over the maximum income to be eligible for the family supplement may, in part, be due to rising wages in response to inflation.

The cause of the decrease in claims is something that we would want to examine more carefully. The fact is that many federal program eligibility requirements and payments are already indexed to inflation including among others, the Canada child tax benefit, the Canada pension plan and the guaranteed income supplement.

[*Translation*]

The indexing of the family income supplement would support the government's efforts to reduce poverty, particularly among groups that are the most affected, that is women and children. The indexing of this component of the program would constitute an additional federal contribution to many provincial anti-poverty strategies.

Before continuing to work and to find new ways of helping families and women, I want once again to thank all my colleagues, both from the government and the opposition, who supported my Motion No. 395. I encourage all my honourable colleagues to support this motion. I want to thank them in advance, as I said, on behalf of all Canadian families and, particularly, all the children who will benefit from it.

Since I do not have this opportunity often as Acting Speaker, I would like to thank my constituents who gave me the honour and privilege to represent them, here in the House.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this private member's motion moved by the member for Ahuntsic.

The motion is one which the Canadian Alliance supports. I know it is a private member's motion, but it fits with our notion that families are hard pressed in Canada, that families are the building block of society, and therefore need all of the help they can get in terms of tax relief.

In this case, it has to do with employment insurance and a provision that deals with an additional benefit to low income families for those people who are collecting employment insurance. Under that system, families are eligible for the supplement if their net income is under \$25,921. It is not a big amount, but the principle is right that we should index this to inflation, in keeping with the idea that we are trying to keep a neutral cost. Inflation does eat away at these things if it is not indexed, and therefore we are supportive of this motion.

As the member who introduced the motion told us earlier, the same concept works with the Canada pension plan, old age security, guaranteed income supplement and the Canadian child tax benefit. The preliminary cost of indexing would be about \$7 million annually. While that is a substantial amount, we believe that it is important that this still be done.

We strongly support and believe that families should benefit and those people who are unfortunate enough to be out of work and having to collect employment insurance should benefit from this provision.

However, I do want to take the opportunity today to talk about some of the problems with the current EI system. This is a band-aid. We believe that reforms need to go far beyond this motion today. While we are supportive of it, we will be pushing hard and are pushing hard for basic reform of employment insurance.

One of the problems we have seen in this place is that the government has used the employment insurance fund, or employment insurance premiums from employers and employees, to build up a tremendous reserve. It has overtaxed or overcharged Canadian employers and employees to the tune of something like \$40 billion over the past eight years.

While people might think that this amount is sitting in a fund someplace, available for employment insurance premiums, that is simply not true. It has gone into general revenue and been spent on a lot of government programs. I would make the case that some of those programs should not be priority programs, and that employment insurance premiums should be reduced for employers and employees so that it is revenue neutral.

We hear from the various people who look at these things, the chief actuaries, that there is a need for about a \$15 billion fund for employment insurance. We think it should be a hard fund that is put in place and should not go into general revenue, but that fund would have to be built up over a period of time. However \$15 billion is what they suggest is necessary to ride out an economic downturn or a cycle in the economy. Unfortunately, that fund has now reached over \$40 billion, which represents \$25 billion being overcharged by the Liberal government over the past several years.

Private Members' Business

It gets worse than that. The fund continues to build about \$3 billion a year. The government is conscious of this. It knows that the fund is building and that it is overcharging, but it will not reduce the amount that is needed to bring this into a revenue neutral position. It is not just families who are collecting EI, about which the private member's motion talks, but families in general are being overcharged because they are employees, and in many cases employers as well. That is our biggest complaint with the EI program. The federal government must simply stop overcharging Canadians on this account.

In addition to that, we believe that the employment insurance program should be brought back to a true insurance program for job loss. That was the original intent some 25 years ago and that has changed. It has become more of a social program these days and we believe it needs to be brought back to a true insurance program and run in a business-like manner. That is what our Canadian Alliance supports and would do if we were elected. We would revamp the EI program.

• (1745)

The minister has told us that the government wants some transparency and that it is looking at that but in the recent budget we were very sorry to hear that the minister had postponed those reforms for a further year. We have to wonder how serious the government is about really making the changes that are necessary to the EI program.

Under our proposal, employment insurance premiums would be set by an independent commission and would be based on the recommendations of a chief actuary, as I have just said. That would vary from time to time, depending on how much is required in the fund, but it would be adjusted to be as revenue neutral as possible. As I said earlier, there would be a hard reserve there that would not be just put into general revenue and spent at the discretion, or lack of discretion in some cases I would point out, by the government.

In addition to that, employer premiums would be experienced so that employers who have a record for fewer layoffs than other employers in the same sector would pay lower premiums. I think this would help in the rationalization of the industry.

In addition to that, there are different methods to resolve the problem that the member who introduced this motion brought forward. We think families are hard-pressed in terms of paying too much tax right now. One of the things that the Canadian Alliance has suggested is that there should be a child tax deduction of \$3,000 per year, which would be off the taxes payable. That would represent about \$3.5 billion in savings to Canadian families per year, which is a substantial amount.

In addition to that, we think there may be some room to do something within the four personal income tax brackets, especially for hard-pressed, middle income families that pay so much tax.

We have a little different point of view. The Liberals seem to think that families earning \$60,000, \$70,000 or \$80,000 a year are rich. We do not think that at all. We know there is a high cost to raising a family in this country. We believe those hard-working taxpayers, who are trying to raise families, trying to put their children through university and trying to do everything they can to provide their

children with opportunities for the future, need some relief. We would reward them by giving personal tax relief.

I was just looking at how much the basic personal exemption is right now. It is only \$7,757 per year before an individual starts paying taxes. It just seems to me that is a very low amount. I hate to get into the debate about what is the poverty level, but I think someone who earns \$7,700 a year should not be on the tax rolls at all. We think the basic exemption should be raised so that individuals working and their spouses should have the same exemption rates. That would provide some relief. The \$3,000 exemption for each child would also make a significant difference so that low income families would be given a leg up. They would be able to work and earn an amount of money that would be more in line with what they need before they would even start paying taxes to the federal government.

The reason we think we have that kind of flexibility is that we think the government is spending far too much money on program spending right now. It is not necessarily the program spending that it is locked into, such as the equalization program, health care and all of that, but the direct program spending for which it is responsible.

In the budget that was brought down on February 18, the finance minister introduced \$25 billion of new spending initiatives over the next three years. That is a 25% increase in spending. Those were the kinds of spending levels this same Liberal government was guilty of from the late 1960s onward for about 15 or 20 years that put us into a very deep hole and caused our national debt to rise to \$536 billion. It has put us in a difficult position.

Canadian families are paying about 22¢ out of every tax dollar they send to Ottawa just to pay the interest on the national debt.

We simply have to correct some of these past failures, not go there again, and give tax relief to Canadian families so they can do things with their tax money with their priorities in mind.

• (1750)

Ms. Eleni Bakopanos: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Because the hon. member for Vancouver East, although I should not mention the absence or presence of members in the House, but I know she was not here to second the motion when I asked for unanimous consent, so may I have unanimous consent to include the hon. member for Vancouver East as having seconded my motion also?

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Therefore the hon. member for Vancouver East is an official seconder to the motion.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Ms. Diane St-Jacques (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to a motion I find very interesting. This is a motion based on mutual assistance, generosity and caring, values we all share. This motion could make a huge difference in the lives of hundreds of Canadian families.

Before going any further, I want to thank my colleague, the member for Ahuntsic, for bringing this topic to our attention. In fact, Motion No. 395 is aimed at indexing the family supplement to the cost of living.

Introduced during the major employment insurance reform carried out by our government in 1996, the family supplement is aimed at providing more targeted assistance to low income families who are unemployed. In fact, it allows beneficiaries with children earning less than \$25,921 to get up to 80% of their insurable earnings instead of 55% as do other beneficiaries.

The latest Employment Insurance Monitoring and Assessment Report published in 2003 shows that the family supplement is efficient and meets the needs and expectations of families. In 2001-02, our government paid close to \$176 million in family supplements to over 187,000 low income beneficiaries. This means that thanks to this measure 10% of all employment insurance beneficiaries are getting higher benefits.

The supplement is about \$42 a week. This is a significant amount of money for those going through tough times. In fact, the benefits of families receiving the family supplement are 38% higher than before the 1996 reform.

Such results are proof that replacing the higher rates for dependents found in the old system with the family supplement was an excellent decision. However, inflation has rendered it less efficient and higher salaries make it less accessible in real terms.

In such a context, there is no doubt that indexing the family supplement to the cost of living could have a positive impact on a number of families.

Several federal benefits and programs are indexed to inflation. The child tax benefit is a case in point.

When we carried out the reform of the employment insurance program in 1996, we made the commitment to keep a close watch on the short and medium term impact. That is why we provided for an annual independent assessment review. That turned out to be quite useful. First, it indicated that the employment insurance program is providing the unemployed with the help they need when they need it. Also, it helped to identify and correct some inadequacies along the way.

In the last couple of years, we made adjustments to the short work weeks, eliminated the intensity rule and changed some of the criteria concerning benefit repayments.

Today, we have an opportunity to consider a proposal that would enhance the employment insurance program. Indexing the family supplement to the cost of living would complement the work we have been doing in the last few years to fight poverty.

The February 2003 budget has helped us to move forward more quickly. Let me remind the House of some of its components. First, we will gradually increase our support to low income families through the Canada child tax benefit. By 2007, with this benefit, we will be providing \$10 billion in annual assistance, twice as much as in 1996.

In a practical sense, this means that next July, the benefit will go up by \$150 annually. In four years, the maximum benefit for a family will be \$3,243 for the first child and \$3,016 for a second child.

Also, in the next five years, the provinces and territories will receive more than \$900 million to improve access to quality day care and promote the development of young children. Our government has certainly proven time and again that it takes the well-being of Canadian families to heart.

● (1755)

Today, the hon. member for Ahuntsic is suggesting a measure that would take our fight against poverty one step further.

Two thirds of the beneficiaries would be mothers. This measure would give low income families more help when some of their members are unemployed.

I have always thought of such measures which directly help Canadian families not as an expense, but as an investment in the future. However, our government is not in the habit of making decisions without a thorough consideration of all the impacts.

EI is a complex program and any change can have a direct impact on the viability and efficiency of the whole plan.

On the face of it, Motion No. 395 seems to be a very interesting proposal.

I urge my colleagues to consider Motion No. 395, because it will help us make a more detailed examination of the impact of indexing the family supplement when we prepare the next budget.

● (1800)

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Motion No. 395 moved by my colleague from Ahuntsic, which reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should index the family supplement to the cost of living in the next Federal Budget.

Let me say first of all that I am the proud young father of a beautiful 8 month old girl named Léa-Pascale. I have always believed that the family unit was a place where a child had to be able to receive all the attention and the love that he or she needed to get off to a good start in life and to build a solid foundation for his or her future. I am therefore all in favour of the family.

Private Members' Business

However, for the family to be able to fulfill those fundamental functions, the parents must have the necessary resolve. I still believe that they have this resolve, but they also need the means. Unfortunately, we know very well that for various reasons, there are many difficulties and a number of well-meaning parents cannot provide their children with the upbringing they would like.

You will therefore understand that to me, the family supplement, which increases benefits for low income families with children, is absolutely essential.

However, if this welcome supplement is to be effective, it must clearly be indexed to the cost of living; otherwise families will be no better off. This is important, all the more so as low income families are the hardest hit by the increase in the cost of living. Indexing the supplement to the cost of living should go without saying.

In fact, in order to maximize this measure, as many programs as possible should be indexed, among them the Canadian child tax benefit, which includes the national child disability benefit scheduled to take effect in July 2003. There is also the early childhood development initiative, based on the September 2000 agreement, which Quebec was promised it could opt out of with financial compensation. That is something we will certainly be reminding the new government in Quebec about. There is also the child-centred family justice strategy, which comes under the responsibility of the Minister of Justice and which is a program entirely under federal jurisdiction.

Therefore I will support Motion No. 395, but not without some reservations, which are far from being trivial.

Since several aspects of the federal family supplement infringe on the jurisdiction of Quebec and since Quebec has the right to opt out of certain programs with financial compensation, it would make sense for the amounts transferred to Quebec to be indexed to the cost of living as well. To do otherwise would be blatantly and absurdly unfair.

Finally, like my party I would have preferred that the motion not put off indexing until the next federal budget but that this clause be included in legislation governing the family supplement. This would enhance this social clause, which would benefit the numerous families who really need it.

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to support this motion and indeed to second it. I thank the House for agreeing to unanimous consent so that I could second the motion. I was delayed in a committee and rushed over here but did not quite make it in time, so I appreciate the House agreeing to that.

I wish to congratulate the member for Ahuntsic. This is a very important motion and I want to thank her for the work she has done on this. I know the member has deep concerns about the health and welfare of low income families and social issues.

The motion before us is a small but important step in helping low income families who are on employment insurance keep pace with the cost of living. The motion seeks approval to index the family supplement to inflation for those families who receive the

supplement and who are in receipt of employment insurance benefits. Regrettably, it is only about 11% of EI claimants who receive these benefits and there is still a maximum weekly benefit of \$413 per week. We are talking about income support that for many families would mean that they are still struggling to make ends meet every month when they go on EI.

In speaking to the motion today and pointing out our support for it, I want to also put it in context. The hon. member mentioned, when she began her debate on the motion, that we have something like 1.5 million children living below the poverty line in Canada. We have something like 5 million Canadians living in poverty. In fact, if one were to look at the reality of what is taking place in various communities across the country to see the kinds of circumstances that people are in, one of the reasons that we have 1.5 million children and so many families living in poverty is because of cutbacks in the EI program.

Although this particular motion would give some small relief to some families that qualify, we still have a massive EI program with cutbacks. There is a \$40 billion surplus in the EI fund and yet many people who were working and who are laid off, particularly if they are seasonal workers, no longer even qualify for the program.

I want to bring this forward because it is a serious situation and devastating for hundreds of thousands of families in Canada that cannot even qualify for the EI program anymore, even though there is a massive surplus sitting there that could be used to provide benefits for people. This particularly affects women who are part time workers and seasonal workers, so we really have to put this in context.

I would point out that this particular motion would be directed at those families who are EI claimants, but who are also receiving the Canada child tax benefit. In fact, the member has pointed out that the child tax benefit also has some indexation.

However, to put this debate in context again, I want to draw the attention of members in the House to the report that recently came out from the National Council of Welfare. Its spring 2003 report called "Welfare Incomes 2002" points out that hundreds of thousands of families across Canada are actually losing ground. The reality is that unfortunately some people who are on EI end up on welfare if they are not able to regain employment. In fact, the National Council of Welfare is "very concerned by the fact that the clawbacks to the federal child tax benefit discriminate against families on welfare". In its 2001 report "Child Poverty Profile 1988", it was estimated that only 66% of poor families benefited from the federal child tax benefit.

● (1805)

The supplement was received by 79% of poor two parent families, but only 57% of poor single parent families were allowed to keep the child tax benefit supplement. As women had most single parent families, the report believed that this constitutes discrimination on the basis of gender.

Private Members' Business

I want to flag this because it is a very important issue when looking at the issue of growing poverty in Canada. While the motion would certainly assist the 87,000 low income claimants who could benefit from this provision of indexation, let us recognize that we have a huge problem in terms of hundreds of thousands of families, particularly lone parent families, who are not benefiting from the child tax benefit.

Indeed, when the program was negotiated by Ottawa with the provinces and territories, there was a goal that no families would be worse off than they were before. Clearly, this has not turned out to be true and in fact there are many families who are indeed now worse off than they were before the child tax benefit.

The other thing that I want to add to the debate, in terms of bringing recognition to the serious problems we have with poverty in the country, is that HRDC is poised to announce massive public policy changes in moving from a measurement of poverty where we have used what is called the low income cutoffs established by Statistics Canada to a market basket measure. By the stroke of a pen this would redefine how we measure poverty in Canada. It would reduce poverty immediately by about one-third, but it would not in any way improve the standard of living of a single kid or a single family.

I put this forward in the debate because I feel that there are some glaring discrepancies in government policy. We are moving in a direction where we may change the way we measure poverty but we would not alleviate poverty. While I welcome the motion today, and that is why I wanted to second it because it is a step in the right direction, I wonder why the government would not have brought it in a heck of a long time ago to give benefit to low income families.

I want to put it in the context of this much larger picture of cutbacks that have been experienced by low income families, whether it is through EI, social income support, the child tax benefit, or lack of housing programs. We are facing a serious situation. We have a social deficit in the country where more people are falling through the cracks.

In my own community in east Vancouver, where we have had provincial cutbacks, people are now living in desperate circumstances and are finding it increasingly difficult to pay the rent, to meet basic food needs, to clothe their children, and some of those people are on EI. Some of them are on welfare and some of them are struggling in low paying minimum wage jobs.

I say to the members in the House today, who expressed interest in the motion, that we should approve the motion, but let us make a commitment, as the House did in 1989 when it supported Ed Broadbent's motion to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000, to make this a social and economic priority. Surely in a country as wealthy as Canada we should not have the United Nations chastizing the Government of Canada for failing to meet its commitments under various international agreements because aboriginal people and poor people are suffering so much as a result of the social deficit.

In closing, I wish to thank the hon. member for bringing the motion forward and I appreciate her work to draw attention to this specific issue and her concern on other social issues, but let us not lose sight of the real work that we need to do in redressing some of

the disastrous public policy decisions that have been made. These decisions have victimized poor people in the country and left them isolated, marginalized, and in some places even criminalized as people resort to more illegal means, such as begging on streets. Look at what happened with the squeegee kids and so on.

● (1810)

I urge members not only to support this motion but also to focus on the bigger picture of addressing poverty in our country because it is something that can be done. We have the resources to do it.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, let me first congratulate the member for Ahuntsic for bringing this motion to the floor of the House of Commons. I was pretty pleased, even in absentia, to second her motion.

The member for Vancouver East basically has said it all in a nutshell. This is a very good motion. It deals with one part of the major problem that we have in relation to poverty. However it is better to deal with one part at a time than to ignore the picture totally, which has happened.

We have to remember that for the last 10 years the present government has constantly been promising to address child poverty, to address poverty and the plight of low income families across the country. However we see very little results. I certainly hope the member, through this motion, can stimulate within her party and within government the desire to start working actively on the problem.

Let us stop talking about poverty. There are many kinds of poverty and there are many ways of helping people in need. As the member for Vancouver East just said, maybe the motion itself will not solve our problem in total, and we all know that, but solving part of it will be certainly a plus and a start. It might also generate the type of debate that is necessary in this very chamber to draw attention to some of the plights of people who live on low incomes and of young people who are out there trying to make it in society with very little help.

Let me just talk about associated issues that fit right in with the motion and that is the need to help families.

One of the major institutions in the country is our unemployment insurance. I was going to say we should be proud but employment insurance is not something perhaps of which we could be proud. It is sort of a necessary evil. We would like to have everybody working when we have such a rich country with so many resources.

My province has only a half a million people and some of the richest resources in the world in relation to hydro power, oil discoveries, our fisheries and so on, yet so many people do not benefit from such resources. Therein should be our main focus to avoid having to worry about the very issue we are talking about tonight.

We all know that will take a tremendous amount of will and work, and it will be well down the road before we will not have to have such a debate. However to even think about it and talk about it is laudable, and we should aim toward getting to that day when we can say to ourselves that we remember when we had poverty in the country. Unfortunately, it probably will not happen for a while.

Private Members' Business

While we have poverty, nobody can do more about it than the very people who are in these hallowed halls in which we now speak.

I talked about the EI fund. People strive to get enough employment to qualify for employment insurance; a small amount of work, quite often at low wages, which means they end up with very low employment insurance. The totality of the income is so minuscule that families cannot survive on that kind of money and any supplement that can be given in any way, shape or form, is a plus.

I am thinking of one particular case where a woman is working to try to make that living. She takes every opportunity to find employment. She drives 70 or 80 miles everyday to work in a cold fish plant to get the few weeks of work which the fish plant offers. Then she finds out she really needs more hours to qualify so she accepts a job which provides only a few hours a week.

• (1815)

However, wanting to work, she continues to work, five, 10, 20 hours a week. She works for x number of weeks before she is laid off because she would rather work than draw employment insurance. She files for employment insurance. She had well beyond the qualifying time because she continued to work, but the last x number of weeks she worked only a few hours a week. Even though it would have been better for her to stay at home, she had the opportunity to work so she kept working. Because of that, her average wage over the qualifying weeks was so small that she was getting something like \$60 to \$80 a week in employment insurance. Imagine what it is like trying to survive on \$60 to \$80 a week.

There is something wrong with our system. Whether it be in the fishery, whether it be working for some company, or whether it is in finding work wherever someone can get it, we are encouraging people who know they are not going to get full time employment to go out during peak periods, get as many qualifying hours as they can in the shortest time possible, and find some way to get out of the workforce. If the work becomes scarce, their qualifying time and amount of pay drags down their benefits. That is one way we could help people.

The other major effect low income has on the families is on the children. Families on low income face the inability to help and encourage and finance their children so they can participate in the various events in society, and in particular to attend post-secondary institutions which these days is a very costly initiative.

A real bug of mine and something I have been pushing is that many young people in this country today cannot afford to get a post-secondary education. People say there are student loans. If they borrow the maximum amount, which I am sure some people in this place know all about, then at the end of the years they spend in university, they come out with a massive debt load. It is like having a mortgage on their shoulders when they start out. What a way to begin life.

Most young people head where the wages are high, which is south of the border. They leave this country and take with them their initiative and education to the benefit of somewhere else. The more sorrowful thing is that the young people know that a student loan cannot cover the costs. If they have other costs besides tuition, for

their apartments, furniture, food or travel, and unless their parents can help them they cannot cover those costs. The young pages here know exactly what I am talking about. If their parents cannot help them, the easiest thing for them to do is not to go to college or university but instead to go out and find a job.

The employment that these people find later on because of their lack of education is quite often part time employment. This means that over the next number of years they will get a minuscule wage and they will not be able to contribute to the education of their children so they will draw social benefits instead of being contributors to society.

People do not want a handout. They want a hand up. Through legislation we can start giving them the type of boost that will get them on their feet so they can not only help themselves, but they can help their children. In turn this will help this great country of ours.

• (1820)

Ms. Eleni Bakopanos: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask for the unanimous consent of the House to have the name of the hon. member for St. John's West, who I know wanted to second the motion, added to the other members who have seconded the motion.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

• (1825)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely delighted to speak in support of Motion No. 395, which is a motion to index the family supplement to the cost of living in the next federal budget.

I am not surprised that this type of motion has come forward by the hon. member for Ahuntsic. She has been so very strong in terms of advocacy for families and children and a number of issues relating to the health and well-being of Canadians. This is certainly a testament to that work.

She has the support of members from all sides of the House on the motion. She also enjoys the support of seconders from all sides of the House. I think that is very telling. It is quite a compliment for the member. I want to add my compliments to her for coming forward with this important motion.

The motion asks the House to approve a recommendation that the government index the family supplement to inflation at the time of the next budget, which would be next February or March in the normal cycle.

The family supplement is paid to employment insurance recipients who are in a low income family, that is, who have an annual income of less than \$25,921, who have children and receive the Canada child tax benefit.

The recipients of the family supplement have an EI benefit rate of 80% of their insurable earnings instead of the 55% which is applicable to most claimants. Like all other claimants, persons receiving the family supplement are subject to a maximum weekly benefit of \$413.

This is not a substantial amount of money. Probably most members would agree it would be nice to have it be more. However, this is a step and I think members will know it is very important for us to continue to put these issues before the House, so that they remind us of the economic condition of our people.

I have often thought that the success of a country really is measured by the health and well-being of its people. In this regard this motion addresses directly the economic well-being which is directly tied in to the social well-being of families with children.

Not too long ago the House amended the Income Tax Act to provide indexation of what are called non-refundable tax credits and other credits. It was basically to take into account the fact that inflation is a reality. Without any indexation it means that over time there is an erosion of the net value, the real value of any payment to Canadians.

The effect of this motion is it is basically a motion of equity. We need to have equity within our system, whether it be the income tax system, the employment insurance system or any other programs in which assistance is available to Canadians in most need. That is precisely what the motion does. It is precisely the reason there is such strong support throughout the House for the motion.

To consider this I think is something that will happen. I think it will garner sufficient support throughout the House because it simply makes good sense. It makes good policy.

I remember a statement that good economic policy makes good social policy and good social policy makes good economic policy. They are inextricably linked. This one ties both of them in very nicely.

We are addressing social responsibility and economic equity. Motion No. 395 provides that.

I am very proud to have participated in the debate. I congratulate the member for Ahuntsic for reminding us of our responsibilities as responsible parliamentarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to raise today an issue of the utmost importance for my riding, highway 35.

I am raising this issue again because, not too long ago, the minister gave me an answer that was not quite in favour of this highway and that did not really reflect the facts.

Adjournment Debate

In response to my question regarding the possibility of using money from the Border Infrastructure Fund—which, as members know, was created in 2002—to complete highway 35, the minister said, and I quote:

—Quebec still has not signed the agreement on provincial bridges and roads, unlike the other provinces. We are willing to sign the agreement and to consider investing in any highway.

First, I would like to clarify one thing in this regard. I want to remind the minister that Ontario has not signed the agreement either. The agreement on provincial bridges and roads deals with the national highway system, or NHS, and I suppose that the minister is referring to that as well. I just wanted to tell him that Ontario has not signed that agreement and was still able to have projects funded.

The same is true of highway 30. Quebec has yet to sign the program for the NHS, the national highway system, and yet it received federal funds.

First, I want to say that Quebec submitted its priorities in terms of highways during negotiations with Ottawa. It even forwarded the five protocols for each of these highways to the federal Minister of Transport.

What is unusual about highway 35 is that it is somewhat separate from the issue of the national highway system. The government created a \$600 million program in 2002 to promote projects known as border networks or infrastructure. It was to work on Canada-U.S. border crossings, for example. At the time, the government said that highways would also qualify for the funding.

We have always contended that this program could fully apply to highway 35 for the simple reason that it starts at a border crossing at Philipsburg and goes to interstate 89, which goes to Boston.

We submitted this to the government and I wrote several times about it. When municipal politicians from Brome—Missisquoi and Saint-Jean were here, I asked the question and the minister gave me an inadequate answer.

I would like to remind the House that the program set aside \$600 million, and of this amount, 50% was allocated to the Windsor crossing. Three hundred million dollars have already been invested in Windsor. It is important that Quebec get its share. I think the geography in this case makes highway 35 eligible for this program.

This involves issues of economic growth for the areas of Saint-Jean and Brome—Missisquoi. It also involves issues of highway safety because there is no boulevard for 20 kilometres leading to the divided highway. It passes through towns. There is a great deal of farming too, and many farmers use the road. So there are certain dangers.

I think the government should make the necessary efforts to allow highway 35 to be completed, for reasons of safety and also for economic reasons, as I mentioned. I invite the government to contribute its half of the funding, and allocate \$90 million of the \$180 million in total needed for construction.

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Saint-Jean for his very relevant question and some of his comments. There are others I will have to correct.

Adjournment Debate

I am answering the question of the hon. member for Saint-Jean on the funding of highway 35, in Quebec.

In Canada, except for national park highways, highways are under provincial and territorial jurisdiction, including the Trans-Canada Highway and highways that are part of the national highway system. However, let me assure you that the Government of Canada is concerned with the state and safety of the national highway system, as well as with its ability to deal with the increased traffic volume.

It is for these very reasons that, for the last 80 years, the Canadian government has funded several shared cost projects for the provincial-territorial highway system. Since 1993, Transport Canada has contributed over \$1.6 billion to highway projects in Canada and \$220 million in Quebec.

In the February 2000 budget, the federal government announced an investment of \$2.65 billion in the infrastructure program, including \$600 million into the strategic highway infrastructure program.

Transport Canada is responsible for this program, which allocated \$500 million for highways, \$70 million for border crossings and \$30 million to set up smart transportation systems. Quebec's share of the highway funding is \$108.5 million.

There are ongoing discussions with Quebec to reach an agreement on the road projects that will be funded with Quebec's \$108.5 million. Highway 35 is part of the national highway system and is therefore eligible for funding under this program. Unfortunately, Quebec has yet to sign the highway program agreement.

I also want to say that on July 2, 2002, the Minister of Transport signed a \$29.5 million agreement with Quebec to repair highway 15 and the Lacolle border crossing with border infrastructure funds from the strategic highway infrastructure program.

Furthermore, on August 9, 2002, the Minister of Industry and minister responsible for infrastructure made public the parameters of the Canadian strategic infrastructure fund for \$2 billion and \$600 million for the border infrastructure fund announced in the 2001 budget. These moneys will help fund the major infrastructure projects with the provinces, territories, municipalities and the private sector.

In closing, I want to say that, on August 22, 2002, the Prime Minister of Canada and the Premier of Quebec announced funding of \$525 million to widen highway 175 between Quebec City and the Saguenay to four lanes. As I said previously, highway 35 is part of the national highway system and is therefore eligible for funding under these two new programs.

The Minister of Transport is closely collaborating with his colleague, the Minister of Infrastructure, and with Quebec to identify other transportation projects eligible for funding under these two infrastructure programs.

• (1835)

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I have noted what my hon. friend just said. I would simply like to tell him that it may be true that Quebec has not signed, but as far as I know, Ontario has not signed either. And yet Ontario benefits from it. I think that it is important that there be some equity among Canada's regions.

If, out of the \$600 million border infrastructure fund, \$300 million has already been allocated to Windsor, it seems to me that Quebec ought to have its share as well. That is what we are saying.

We need \$90 million of the \$600 million in this fund in order to complete our highway. We believe we are eligible for this program. We believe that the government should make an effort to improve the quality of life in the Upper Richelieu, to improve economic development and safety. I am still asking the federal government to do its part. Quebec is ready now; its 50% share is on the table. Now we are waiting for Ottawa.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, there is one thing that I would like to point out to my colleague. He accepts the fact that Quebec has not signed this agreement. But he wants to go beyond that. I would like to remind him that, unless this agreement is signed, it becomes very difficult for the government to act within this agreement.

However, as we all know—and my colleague knows it very well—a new government was elected in Quebec last week. I think that the newly elected Liberal Party of Quebec intends to deal more openly with the Government of Canada. I therefore hope that we will be able to complete and sign these agreements in the very near future, and move ahead with projects designed to improve the road system in Quebec.

I certainly hope that highway 35 will be considered, and at the same time, I would like the government to include in the national highway system highway 50 in my region.

• (1840)

CANADIAN TELEVISION FUND

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my reason for rising in the adjournment debate this evening is that I repeatedly put questions to the Minister for Canadian Heritage but never got a satisfactory answer.

Today again I asked her what she intends to do to remedy the situation, yet she failed to make any real commitment. Tomorrow perhaps, with the Minister of Finance, she may announce the various measures that will be taken to set things straight.

The television production industry is going through a crisis, because the government announced in its last budget \$25 million in cuts. If we subtract \$25 million from the \$100 million allocated, this leaves \$75 million in funding, and this measure applies not only to the current year but also to the following one. Broadcasting will therefore undergo cuts two years in a row.

Again today, the Minister of Canadian Heritage was unable to be specific about how she intended to deal with the situation. While she has said that an announcement will be made on Thursday by her colleague, the Minister of Finance, and herself to make up for this loss, the crisis shows how the Minister of Canadian Heritage has failed to defend the funding with the Minister of Finance. Given how little he cares for culture, it is no wonder that \$25 million was cut in the Canadian television fund budget.

Adjournment Debate

This is a fund that was established in 1997, specifically to support television production in Quebec and Canada. We have been told that several private partners, as well as the federal government, provide funding for television production.

To give an idea of what this fund is all about, in 1996-97, Canadian Heritage contributed \$100 million, while satellite broadcasting companies contributed \$48 million and Telefilm Canada, \$45 million, for a total of \$193 million, or nearly \$200 million.

Afterwards, satellite broadcasters contributed more to the fund as the number of subscribers went up. It is prorated to the number of subscribers. The share of satellite broadcasters has nearly doubled.

In 2002-03, there were \$260 million in the fund. In 2003-04, the fund was cut not by \$25 million but by \$25 million plus a further \$4 million, as the CRTC established new rules for cable operators that were supposed to contribute to the Canadian television fund a certain percentage of their revenues, namely 4%.

But now the CRTC has asked cable operators to put all this money into community television networks because they are managing them. So the fund is now short \$30 million.

These cuts hurt a lot. They are unjustified. Who is paying the price of these cuts? Both greater Montreal and the regions. The regions were getting \$2.1 million of the \$76 million earmarked for TV production in Quebec. This means that this year there will be no money for TV production in the regions.

The government is sending a confusing message. It says TV production must increase so we can have Canadian content, and I would also say Quebec content, but as a result of these cuts there will be less Canadian content on our various networks.

That has hurt artists a lot. It means hundreds of hours less of work for artists. Jobs will disappear. People in this field have every right to be worried. I met with these workers several times during the past few weeks.

I asked these questions several weeks ago. The Canadian heritage minister said Liberal members had been lobbying her, but I must say that, as the critic for Canadian heritage, I have been doing my job and I have urged the minister to act as quickly as possible in this file.

• (1845)

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to apologize to the member for Québec. I am standing in for the parliamentary secretary at a moment's notice to answer the question, and, unfortunately, I realize that the question comes from the member for Québec, but that all my notes are in English. I will ask my colleague to be patient and understanding because I will answer her question in French. I believe that francophones from Quebec should speak French to each other.

I am pleased to answer the question asked by my colleague on the issue of the importance of Canadian stories, events and themes that are shown on television, which is one of Canada's favourite pastimes.

The Canadian government has a remarkable record in supporting our Canadian television programs. One great moment occurred in 1996 when the government created the Canadian television fund, a

joint initiative of the private and public sectors which provides \$200 million every year for productions.

This fund has been sufficiently generous to be able to create considerable impact on prime time programming. Since then, in excess of 2,600 projects have received financial assistance from the fund. That translates into some 13,700 hours of good TV, good Canadian programming, with production budgets in excess of \$4.1 billion.

Whether documentaries, children's programs, arts and entertainment, English, French or aboriginal programs, in all parts of the country this programming is in prime time, that is the time when Canadians like to watch good TV.

The Canadian television fund is one of our government's success stories. It supports and reflects what is good about Canada to the people of Canada.

I see time is passing quickly, but I must remind my colleague that the Minister of Canadian Heritage has already stated this week that she is working with the Minister of Finance to review the situation and try to settle the immediate or short term problems relating to this fund.

As the Minister of Canadian Heritage has said this week, and I repeat, the Minister of Finance and herself are working closely together to find solutions to this problem.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, some say that the Minister of Canadian Heritage is working, but I would have liked to see her working before there was an outcry in the cultural and television sector.

When I asked her my initial questions, the heritage minister did not seem to understand the problem, because she said that there was enough money in the fund and that we would be fully able to respond to the needs.

What made the minister act was the pressure here in the House and on those who work in television. The minister is campaigning in the Liberal leadership race along with the Finance Minister and they are both well aware that it would have a very negative impact on their campaign if they did not give their approval to this proposal.

The amount of \$25 million which the minister will announce tomorrow is not enough. We will have to continue the fight year after year because we are living in a small market. Therefore, profits are not large enough to allow for a television production pool which would meet the needs of broadcasters, who need a sound, viable and competitive product.

Adjournment Debate

•(1850)

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, I simply want to remind the hon. member for Québec that representations have been made. I am aware of several representations made on this side of the House by my colleagues from Quebec and by our colleagues in the Senate.

Indeed, the Canadian heritage minister and the finance minister are examining this situation very closely. It would seem that my colleague already knows what will be announced tomorrow. I will

not try to guess what is in the offing, but I am confident that both ministers will examine the situation thoroughly to come up with a solution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:51 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, April 30, 2003

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

<p>Canadian Improv Games</p> <p>Mr. Peterson 5631</p> <p>Canadian Emergency Preparedness College</p> <p>Mrs. Gallant 5631</p> <p>Cadet Program</p> <p>Mr. Maloney 5631</p> <p>Canadian Council of Christians and Jews</p> <p>Mr. Bélanger 5632</p> <p>Rosemary Brown</p> <p>Ms. Neville 5632</p> <p>Member for LaSalle—Émard</p> <p>Miss Grey 5632</p> <p>Health</p> <p>Ms. Sgro 5632</p> <p>Status of Women</p> <p>Ms. Bourgeois 5632</p> <p>Battle of the Atlantic</p> <p>Mr. Grose 5633</p> <p><i>Gilligan's Island</i></p> <p>Mr. Solberg 5633</p> <p>Responsible Fishing Award</p> <p>Mr. Wappel 5633</p> <p>Aboriginal Affairs</p> <p>Mrs. Desjarlais 5633</p> <p>Aboriginal Affairs</p> <p>Ms. St-Hilaire 5633</p> <p>Quebec General Election</p> <p>Ms. Frulla 5634</p> <p>Softwood Lumber</p> <p>Mr. Casey 5634</p> <p>National Model United Nations</p> <p>Mr. Patry 5634</p> <p>Masters Champion</p> <p>Mr. Harris 5634</p>	<p>Mr. Merrifield 5635</p> <p>Ms. McLellan 5636</p> <p>Taxation</p> <p>Mr. Duceppe 5636</p> <p>Mr. Chrétien 5636</p> <p>Mr. Duceppe 5636</p> <p>Mr. Chrétien 5636</p> <p>Mr. Paquette 5636</p> <p>Mr. Dion 5636</p> <p>Mr. Paquette 5636</p> <p>Mr. Dion 5636</p> <p>Health</p> <p>Mr. Robinson 5636</p> <p>Mr. Chrétien 5637</p> <p>Mr. Robinson 5637</p> <p>Ms. McLellan 5637</p> <p>Mr. Clark 5637</p> <p>Ms. McLellan 5637</p> <p>Mr. Clark 5637</p> <p>Mr. Chrétien 5637</p> <p>Foreign Affairs</p> <p>Mr. Day 5637</p> <p>Mr. Chrétien 5638</p> <p>Mr. Day 5638</p> <p>Mr. Chrétien 5638</p> <p>Taxation</p> <p>Mr. Gauthier 5638</p> <p>Mr. Dion 5638</p> <p>Mr. Gauthier 5638</p> <p>Mr. Dion 5638</p> <p>Taxation</p> <p>Mr. Jaffer 5638</p> <p>Mr. Wilfert 5638</p> <p>Mr. Jaffer 5639</p> <p>Mr. Wilfert 5639</p> <p>Canadian Heritage</p> <p>Ms. Gagnon (Québec) 5639</p> <p>Ms. Copps 5639</p> <p>Ms. Gagnon (Québec) 5639</p> <p>Ms. Copps 5639</p> <p>Airline Industry</p> <p>Mr. Moore 5639</p> <p>Mr. Collenette 5639</p> <p>Mr. Moore 5639</p> <p>Mr. Collenette 5639</p> <p>Highway Infrastructure</p> <p>Mr. Savoy 5640</p> <p>Mr. Rock 5640</p> <p>Fisheries</p> <p>Mr. Stoffer 5640</p>
<p>ORAL QUESTION PERIOD</p>	
<p>Health</p> <p>Mr. Harper 5635</p> <p>Ms. McLellan 5635</p> <p>Mr. Harper 5635</p> <p>Ms. McLellan 5635</p> <p>Mr. Harper 5635</p> <p>Ms. McLellan 5635</p> <p>Mr. Merrifield 5635</p> <p>Ms. McLellan 5635</p>	

Mr. Thibault	5640
Mr. Stoffer	5640
Mr. Thibault	5640
Health	
Mr. Clark	5640
Ms. Whelan (Essex)	5640
Mr. Keddy	5640
Mr. Chrétien	5640
Industry	
Mr. Abbott	5641
Mr. Rock	5641
Mr. Abbott	5641
Mr. Rock	5641
Gasoline Prices	
Mr. Crête	5641
Mr. Rock	5641
Mr. Crête	5641
Mr. Rock	5641
Fisheries	
Mr. Burton	5641
Mr. Thibault	5641
Mr. Lunn	5641
Mr. Thibault	5641
Port of Churchill	
Mr. Harvard	5642
Mr. Pagtakhan	5642
Health	
Mrs. Skelton	5642
Ms. McLellan	5642
Mrs. Skelton	5642
Ms. McLellan	5642
National Defence	
Mr. Bachand (Saint-Jean)	5642
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre—Rosedale)	5642
Fisheries	
Mr. Murphy	5642
Mr. Thibault	5642
Business of the House	
The Speaker	5643
Points of Order	
Oral Question Period	
Mr. Reynolds	5643
Mr. Boudria	5643
Decorum in the Chamber	
Mr. Clark	5643
Mr. Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte)	5643
Mr. Hearn	5644
Mr. Stoffer	5644

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Government Response to Petitions	
Mr. Regan	5644

Parliament of Canada Act	
Mr. Boudria	5644
Bill C-34. Introduction and first reading	5644
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	5644
Interparliamentary Delegations	
Mr. Patry	5644
Committees of the House	
Industry, Science and Technology	
Mr. Lastewka	5645
Official Languages	
Mr. Godin	5645
Petitions	
Marriage	
Mrs. Wayne	5645
Canadian Emergency Preparedness College	
Mrs. Gallant	5645
Iraq	
Mr. Bagnell	5645
Fisheries	
Mr. Cummins	5645
Mr. Cummins	5645
Bill C-250	
Mr. Cummins	5645
Coast Guard	
Mr. Cummins	5645
Agriculture	
Mr. Steckle	5645
Firearms Registry	
Mr. Steckle	5646
Stem Cell Research	
Mr. Vellacott	5646
Foreign Affairs	
Ms. McDonough	5646
Bill C-420	
Mr. Lunney	5646
Stem Cell Research	
Mr. Szabo	5646
Marriage	
Mr. Szabo	5646
Canadian Institutes of Health Research	
Mr. Szabo	5646
Questions Passed as Orders for Returns	
Mr. Regan	5647
Motions for Papers	
Mr. Regan	5647
Mr. Anderson (Victoria)	5647
Transferred for debate	5647

GOVERNMENTS ORDERS

Canadian Environmental Assessment Act	
Mr. Anderson (Victoria)	5647
Bill C-9. Third reading	5647
Mr. Lunn	5649
Mr. Bigras	5650

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