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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, September 30, 2003

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, September 30, 2003

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

•(1000)

[*Translation*]

POINT OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House, the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier asked a question and I promised to provide an answer as soon as possible.

In fact, I have reread the text of the question carefully. It asked the government whether an RCMP investigation was being carried out. As we all know, the government does not comment on whether or not RCMP investigations are being carried out. I cannot therefore provide any additional information, because we do not, of course, comment on whether or not investigations of this kind are under way.

[*English*]

The Speaker: I am sure the House appreciates the intervention of the hon. government House leader.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

SUPREMACY OF PARLIAMENT—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot on September 15, 2003, concerning remarks by a judge which have since been quoted by other judges and which he regards as contemptuous of this House.

Let me start by thanking the hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot for raising this important issue, as well as the hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast and the hon. member for Mississauga South for their interventions.

The hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot stated that a remark made by Mr. Justice Iacobucci in his 1998 ruling on the case of *Vriend v. Alberta*, which has since been cited by two other judges, infringes on the supremacy of Parliament and is contemptuous.

•(1005)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Justice Iacobucci was quoted on page 7342 of *Debates of the House of Commons* of September 15, 2003 as follows:

In my opinion, groups that have historically been the target of discrimination cannot be expected to wait patiently for the protection of their human dignity and equal rights while governments move toward reform one step at a time. If the infringement of the rights and freedoms of these groups is permitted to persist while governments fail to pursue equality diligently, then the guarantees of the Charter will be reduced to little more than empty words.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot asserted that, by his reference to “governments”, the judge was actually referring to Parliament. However, as I read them, the judicial comments of which the hon. member complains suggest that the courts should not wait for the government or Parliament to introduce legal reforms as this can take too long or be incomplete in the end result.

Seen in this light, in my view, the judge's comments would seem to focus on the parliamentary process rather than on Parliament itself. To be sure, the comments are critical of the process where it may be slow to provide remedies in respect of legal rights, but this is the sort of comment any Canadian might make and one that the judge might have considered appropriate given the facts of the case before him. Cases may occur where comments made by a judge are so egregious as to require your Speaker's comment but it does not appear to me that this is such an instance.

In this case, in the context of the privileges of the House, where the dignity of this parliamentary chamber may be offended in the minds of some hon. members, my task is to weigh the character of the judicial comments against the freedom that must be allowed to a court, and to this chamber, to explain its actions as it sees fit. In my view, there is no animus against the House or its dignity in the remarks of which the hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot complains.

A regime of mutual respect ought to govern the relationship between the courts and the House. Each must be free to discharge its responsibilities without criticism from the other. In this case, the observations complained of by the hon. member do not, in my view, amount to a contempt of the House.

Accordingly, I do not find a *prima facie* breach of privilege in this case.

*Supply***OFFICE OF THE PRIVACY COMMISSIONER**

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 8(2) of the Auditor General Act, a special report on the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), this report is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

PETITIONS

HEALTH

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is with honour that I present petitions with the signatures of 10,679 Canadians who are asking for Parliament to support Private Member's Motion No. 83.

Motion No. 83 asks the health committee to examine whether abortions are medically necessary as defined by the Canada Health Act and to compare the health risks for women undergoing abortions to those for women who carry their babies to full term. I would like to thank the 10,679 Canadians who signed the petitions. As members will see, the number of petitions is quite large and I submit them.

* * *

• (1010)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved:

That this House call upon the government to hold a referendum within one year to determine whether Canadians wish to replace the current electoral system with a system of proportional representation and, if so, to appoint a commission to consult Canadians on the preferred model of proportional representation and the process of implementation, with an implementation date no later than July 1, 2006.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the debate today in the House is on the idea of appointing a parliamentary committee or commission to study the various methods of proportional representation and then to put the idea to the Canadian people in a national referendum, whereby the people themselves choose whether or not they want to have this new system of proportional representation or the status quo.

The vote this afternoon will be an historic vote. The House last voted on the idea of PR in 1923, some 80 years ago. I believe that it is time we had a good look at our voting system.

To me, a fundamental principle of democracy is how we represent the will of the people in our parliamentary institutions. All voters deserve to be represented equally in the Parliament of Canada. What proportional representation does is empower the people so that every vote counts, no vote is wasted and all votes are represented equally here in the House of Commons of Canada.

Our system does not do that. All we have to do is look at the present Parliament. In November 2000 in the federal election campaign, the Liberal Party took barely 41% of the votes and yet has an overwhelming majority in the House of Commons.

The motion looks at the various modes of proportional representation that would be relevant to our country. As I said, this will be the first vote since 1923 on PR. It is about time for us to do this, because our country is suffering from what I call a democratic deficit.

I believe we are literally sleepwalking toward a crisis in democracy in our country. In the last election campaign, about 60% of the people participated. In the campaign before that it was 67%. Years ago, 75%, 80% and more than 80% of people participated in elections.

People are losing faith in the parliamentary system, in the voting system, in terms of it representing their issues in the House of Commons. I believe that it is time to catch up with the rest of the world. Most Canadians are not aware that there are now only three countries in the world with more than eight million people that use the pure first past the post system: Canada, India and the United States of America.

In the United States in the last campaign for president, George W. Bush got 550,000 fewer votes than Al Gore, but who is the President of the United States? It is George W. Bush, not Al Gore.

Those are the kinds of distortions that we have in a first past the post system. Even in the British system, the mother of our parliamentary system, there is now a measure of proportional representation in the Welsh parliament and in the Scottish parliament. All MPs are elected to the European parliament through proportional representation, and there is a commitment from the Prime Minister of Britain to have a referendum on the idea for Westminster itself.

We are one of a few countries in the world that uses a system invented before the telephone, a system that is archaic, a system that does not represent or mirror the voting intention of the people of the country in the Parliament of Canada. In fact, I think a lot of people would be scandalized to realize that most of the majority governments we have had have been elected by a minority of the people.

Supply

We have had 16 majority governments since 1921, including today's. This Prime Minister has had three majority governments, all of which were elected by a minority of the people. In fact, of the 16 majority governments, only four had a majority of the people voting for them: Mackenzie King in 1940 and 1949, Diefenbaker in 1958, and then Brian Mulroney, who had almost exactly 50%, about 49.99%, in 1984.

Most majority governments in the country have been elected by a minority of the people. We are one of the few countries in the world left using this archaic system whereby the minority can elect a majority, this country and the United States.

As I have said, Parliament does not mirror how the people vote so it is no wonder that people are giving up and losing faith in the voting system. I was elected in 1968 and I was out of politics after 1993 for four years. Before I lost in 1993, I used to think that the first past the post system was a wonderful system. It treated me very well. It treated all of us very well; that is why we are here. But after four years with the ordinary people and hearing what they had to say, I realized that people in the country are losing faith in the voting system.

When I came back here in 1997, I looked around Parliament and saw a majority government across the way that was elected by 38% of the people. I saw the Reform Party and the Progressive Conservative Party. I looked at the results. They both had 19% of the votes. Then I looked at the seats. There were 60 Reform MPs and there were 20 Conservative MPs in that corner of the House.

• (1015)

[*Translation*]

I looked at the number of votes cast in favour of the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. Each party received about 11% of the vote, which elected 21 New Democrats and, I believe, 43 or 44 Bloc Québécois members.

[*English*]

We had a Parliament that did not represent or reflect how the people had voted.

[*Translation*]

There is a real democratic deficit in the Parliament of our country. Even though, in the last federal election, they did not even get 41% of the vote, we now have a government with a strong majority.

The number of votes cast for two parties, the Progressive Conservatives and New Democrats, represented about 21% of Canada's population, but taken together, these two parties have only 25 or 26 seats, which is 8% of the seats in this House.

On the provincial level, we see exactly the same thing. I remember the Quebec election five or six years ago. Jean Charest, the leader of the Liberal Party, received more votes than Lucien Bouchard. But who was elected premier of Quebec? Lucien Bouchard.

At about the same time in British Columbia, there was an election in which the Liberal Party received more votes than my own party, the NDP. But who formed the government? The New Democratic Party, with a majority government. There are distortions everywhere in our electoral system.

[*English*]

However, under proportional representation, if a party were to receive 20% of the votes, the party would receive 20% of the seats in the legislature or in Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Yesterday, there was an election in Prince Edward Island. The Liberal Party—the party of the leader of the federal government sitting opposite—received some 43% or 44% of the votes, which translates into less than 15% of the seats in the Prince Edward Island Legislative Assembly.

[*English*]

The distortions are all over the place.

I ask members of the House to look at the reasons for proportional representation and why countries around the world have adopted a system of PR. First, the question of fairness, where every vote counts and every vote counts equally regardless of where one lives in the country.

Today that does not happen. One would think almost all the people in Ontario are Liberals because they have almost all the seats in Ontario and yet they receive only half the votes. One would think almost everybody in the west was for the Alliance or the former Reform Party and yet the Alliance or the former Reform Party, with an overwhelming majority of the seats, has less than half the votes in the west and remain a minority party in western Canada.

What is important about proportional representation is that people can vote for their first choice and their first choice would count. How exciting that would be. We would have a different voting configuration across this country. People could actually vote for the Liberal Party in rural western Canada and their vote would count, vote for the NDP in Alberta or Quebec and their vote would count, vote for the Alliance in Newfoundland and their vote would count or vote for the Conservative Party in the province of Quebec and their vote would count. People could vote for their first choice and their vote would count here in the House of Commons.

Systems of proportional representation all over the world have provided women with much greater representation in the parliaments and legislative assemblies and provided minorities with a much greater representation for the simple reason that under proportional representation, if a party does not have a team of candidates that reflects that region, then that party will be judged harshly by the electorate. It is a way of involving more women and more minorities.

I think the Liberal Party should think about the question of national unity. We have, in essence, five regional parties in the House of Commons, including the Liberal Party. If we had proportional representation it would force every party to have a national vision. For every party the vote in Chicoutimi, Quebec would be worth the same as the vote in Bathurst, New Brunswick, Kamsack, Saskatchewan or in Kamloops, British Columbia. It would force all parties to have a national vision about where this country should go.

Supply

At the same time it would provide the flexibility where there could be regional parties, because any vision of PR in a big federation, whether it be one based on province by province rights or region by region breakdowns, where we can have a party like the Bloc Quebecois which would have a vision for Quebec and yet do very well in the province of Quebec, or any other province, for a party of a different political ideology or stripe. Those are some of the reasons for proportional representation.

I want to look at some of the arguments made by the government and people across the country who are skeptical of changing our voting system. One of the silliest arguments I have heard ever from the government House leader was when he said last week that we were a federation. I can only think of one federation in the world which has proportional representation and that is Germany. A little bit of research shows we have some 25 federations in the world. Some 14 of those federations have a measure of PR and seven of those are in Europe. Being a federation does not preclude or exclude the possibility of having a system based on proportional representation.

Second, some people say that we will lose the direct election of our local members of Parliament. That does not have to be the case. I believe in a system of PR called a mixed member proportional, where we elect some MPs riding by riding and some MPs on a proportional list. Germany is the best example of a mixed member proportional system where half the MPs are elected riding by riding, so they have their local representative and half of them are on the list. There are 13 countries in the world that have the German system with the mixed member proportional.

People in Germany get two ballots. They vote for their candidate of choice in their own riding, be it Vancouver East or elsewhere, and then they vote for their party of preference. The preferential list determines the proportion of the seats for each party in the House of Commons, the Parliament or the legislative assembly. In the end we get our local member of Parliament but if our party gets 20% of the votes we also get 20% of the seats.

The government House leader would say that the people who are elected proportionally do not represent anyone in particular. That does not have to be the case. They can represent the province or the region from where they are elected. Our present senators are supposed to be representing the province from which they are chosen, so why could these regional MPs not represent the province?

My vision is to have a mixed member proportional done on a province by province basis across the country. The regional MPs from Saskatchewan, B.C. or Newfoundland would represent their province as an entity. The local MP, the member for Vancouver East, would represent her riding, as she does today.

● (1020)

The mixed member proportional system is a system that would provide the best of both worlds: local representation and proportionality. If someone received only 5% or 10% of the votes, his or her party would have 5% or 10% of the MPs rather than no MPs. That is why this system is used in almost every country around the world.

Some people say that it will be unstable and that there will be nothing but minority governments. What is stable about our system today where with 37% or 38% of the votes there is a majority government and 63% of the people who voted for opposition parties are in the minority? Does that create stability?

I have been around this place for a while. I have seen minority governments and I have seen them work well. I remember in 1972-74 when Pierre Trudeau had a minority Parliament and it worked well. There was a working relationship at that time between the Trudeau government and the New Democratic Party.

Before I arrived here in the 1960s, Pearson, one of our best prime ministers, never had a majority government. Lester Pearson, who was prime minister from 1963 to 1968, and was one of the best prime ministers we ever had, ran one of the most productive Parliaments we ever had. Minority governments do work well. They are more representative and reflective of the people.

I know this may lead to a radical idea and may send shivers through the government House leader's body. We may end up having what is called a coalition government. I see he is already shaking, shivering and quivering. I know it is radical in our country but coalition governments exist all over the world. There is one today in Saskatchewan which is doing very well. It is a coalition government with a majority of NDP members and a minority of Liberals. That government has governed now for four years.

If that is the way people vote, then that is the way people vote. We would then have a Parliament that would reflect the voting intentions of the people.

People may also say that it may not be as democratic, that the leaders would have too much say and that the party hierarchy would choose the candidates on the lists. Any system of PR would never have my support unless it included an open and democratic election of candidates by all parties on the preferential list. We could do that through a big convention, through a primary or through a one member one vote process. It could be done in many ways but it would have to be open, democratic, accessible and visible for each and every Canadian.

Now we hear the argument: Why should we not try it at the provincial level? My answer for the minister across the way is that we should show some leadership in the House of Commons. Some of the provinces are showing leadership.

In his throne speech Premier Jean Charest said that there would be a measure of PR in the Quebec national assembly in the election after the next. British Columbia and Prince Edward Island are studying the issue. The leader of the Liberal Party in Ontario, Dalton McGuinty, has said that there will be a chance for the voters of Ontario to make a decision on changing the voting system if he becomes the premier of that province. He has told voters that they will decide how elections will work. He said:

The time has come for a full, open public debate on voting reform. When almost half of the public does not see the point in heading to the polls, we have already had a non-confidence vote in our democracy.

A number of Liberals and a number of people of all political stripes at the provincial level are now saying that the time has come to change the voting system and that we should allow the people to have a say as to what kind of system they want.

When we look around the world we find that our voting system is very archaic. As I said, we are only one of three large countries that use first past the post. Most countries use a form of proportional representation.

I watched with interest when the Soviet Union fell apart and the political leadership in Russia, the Ukraine, Poland and many other countries in the old Soviet Union were looking for a voting system that would best represent the people of their countries. They looked at our system as well as other systems around the world. The interesting thing was that not one of those countries chose our first past the post system of voting because they felt it was not democratic and would not reflect the voters' intentions in the parliaments of those particular countries.

• (1025)

New democracies, old democracies, New Zealand, and many democracies have switched to a system that has a measure of proportional representation.

What I am excited about is that proportional representation empowers the people. Every vote counts and every vote would be represented in the House of Commons. Many systems have a threshold where a party must receive 3% or 5%, so every vote for a party preference of 3% or 5% is represented. Other countries have systems without a threshold.

These are issues that a parliamentary committee can study and make recommendations on. Those are the things that make the proportional representation system a much better one in terms of empowering and exciting people about the political process.

Finally, we have today a motion before the House that says we should study the various forms of proportional representation that can be relevant to our unique federation. We should propose the model that the committee comes up with to the Canadian people in a national referendum so that people will have a chance to choose between the new model and the status quo, first past the post, as people did in New Zealand.

I ask the government House leader, and government members across the way, what is wrong with letting the people of the country have their say?

Supply

If Dalton McGuinty, who is about to be the premier of Ontario, is saying that the people should have a say in a referendum on the democratic deficit and on the voting system, what is wrong in putting the question to the Canadian people at the appropriate time so that they decide what is the best way to reflect their views and represent them in the House of Commons?

This is not a decision for politicians. It is not a decision for a government, particularly a government that represents a minority of the people. It is a decision for the people of Canada to make at the time of a national referendum.

We had a referendum on the Charlottetown accord and we can also have a referendum on the voting system.

I wish to conclude by saying that what we must do is represent the will of the people in this chamber and the way to do it is by changing the voting system in Canada.

• (1030)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment the member for yet again raising this issue for debate. It is important that we debate matters which may not at first blush fit in with our set ways.

Many countries have proportional representation or some form of it. There are many hybrids of this.

With regard to the one that the member is proposing as one that we might want to consider, I looked at it in one of his previous speeches. It is a system whereby there would be candidates in every riding but there would not be as many ridings as there are today. We would probably have 200 ridings in Canada instead of 301 or 307 as the case may be.

That effectively means that all members of Parliament who are elected in a riding would have 50% more constituents than they do today which makes it extremely difficult for them to have that intimacy with constituents in terms of serving their needs.

The second aspect is that the balance of the seats in the House of Commons would be represented by those on lists in the proportion of the votes that they received in the second balloting.

This would create a second class of member of Parliament. Some would be directly elected and have all these constituents to take care of, and others could very well be those who could not get elected on their merit. Quite frankly it raises some concern about whether or not the homogeneity of the House of Commons in terms of the common bond of association would cease to exist.

Could the member comment on those two points?

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, all the motion says is that we should have a committee or commission study the form of proportional representation that might be most appropriate for our country and have a national referendum. It does not prejudice Parliament by saying we want system A, system B or system C.

Supply

I have my preference. My preference is a mixed member proportional system like in Germany or in 13 countries around the world because that system combines both local MPs and proportionality. But that is not part of the motion. We should have a study as to what system would be most appropriate for our country, even though I believe and hope that the German system is probably the one we would most likely accept in Canada, if we do accept proportional representation.

My vision also includes abolishing the unelected Senate and bringing the checks and balances right into the House of Commons by empowering the House, by having stronger and more independent committees, committees to initiate legislation, timetable legislation and so on.

Regarding second class MPs, under the mixed member proportional system, half the MPs would be elected riding by riding and the other half proportionally in order to represent the regions. Yet we vote directly by regions in this country so that we have some elected representatives in Saskatchewan as a whole, British Columbia or New Brunswick. The senators are supposed to represent those regions now.

We have six Saskatchewan senators who are supposed to represent Saskatchewan, but they are not accountable and democratic. The people elected on a PR list would have to face the people again in four years and be elected, be accountable and have democratic scrutiny as to whether or not they should return. In that way we would not have two classes of MPs. Both would be elected and be accountable, both would have constituencies and constituents, and both would have to face the electorate every four years. That system is used in 13 countries around the world.

It does not have to be fifty-fifty. It could be that 60% represent ridings and 40% are elected on the list. These are details that should be studied. That is why I want a parliamentary committee or a parliamentary commission to study the appropriate system of PR for our country. We are one of the few countries in the world that uses an outdated first past the post system.

•(1035)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I support the hon. member and his party in this initiative that they have undertaken to draw attention to what he described as an archaic system. It is well known across the land. I also support his initiative that would result in a referendum where the people would decide upon what system they want to see.

However, I do have a concern when he talks about fairness. He talked about the fairness of the proposal or the model that he is putting forward that would see some MPs selected as representatives of ridings and others selected from a list. He said, if I heard him correctly, that there could be a convention to actually have the parties put forward a slate of names and then have them elect people at a convention that would ultimately be on the list.

I wonder, given the present party discipline of the various parties and their leaders, what would lead him to believe that the leaders would give up that type of power?

My concern is that we would see a system whereby the parties' proportional lists, that some MPs would be selected from, would be

controlled by the parties themselves and by the leaders. I only need to draw attention to the need for free votes in this House of Commons.

Supposedly we just had a free vote. His party was the only party where the leader brought down the heavy hand and said that none of his members were going to be allowed to vote freely to represent their constituents or to represent their own conscience on the issue of redefining traditional marriage. Instead, they would have to vote the party line.

What would lead him to believe that his party and his leader would give up the power to ensure that the people on the proportional list were people that his leader wanted?

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I would not support any system that did not have an open and democratic selection process for people on the proportional list. Parliament would have to write the rules and draft the legislation to ensure the process was democratic.

It was not long ago in this country when people said that parliamentary leaders would never agree to an election law that would outlaw corporate and union funding. I never thought I would see my party agree to a law that would prohibit us from getting trade union funding for election campaigns, but we did. Things change and people evolve. A democratic system should be in place where candidates are democratically chosen.

It does not have to be just one member-one vote or a convention. We could use the single transferrable ballot. There are many different systems that are democratic, open and transparent. Those conditions would have to be met for me to support it. Ballots must be secret. We should have a system where party leaders do not control the voting process; it must be controlled by the people themselves. I would not support any other system unless it had that component in it. I sincerely mean that in terms of my answer to the member from British Columbia.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle because he has taken the lead, in this Parliament and in other Parliaments, to bring forward this issue of democracy and parliamentary reform and proportional representation. He has been a real champion of that.

In listening to the arguments that he has laid out, it strikes me that the single greatest impediment to bringing forward democracy in PR is the Liberal government. It has huge vested interests in keeping the system as it is and preventing some sort of measure of proportional representation.

I would like the member to talk about how this should also be debated in Canadian communities. We have seen groups like Fair Vote Canada and other organizations. This is a massive campaign outside of Parliament to bring forward PR. Would he comment on that?

Supply

•(1040)

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right that the opposition to this idea is in a large extent motivated by what I call political greed. The government across the way has a majority with 40% of the votes. Under PR it would not have a majority. The majority of people have voted for the opposition parties.

Governments that have majorities are not interested in changing the voting system because it works well for them. It worked well for me for many years. That is why politicians who are incumbents are wedded to the system. When they are thrown out of office, the same is true of the NDP, this is not a left-right type of issue. We have the Alliance, the NDP and the Bloc together on this.

I had a press conference once with some of the most right wing members of the Alliance and the leader of the Marxist-Leninists in British Columbia. It is not a left-right issue. It is a question of the who is in and who is out, whether it is the NDP or the Conservatives or the Liberals or whomever. If we get a big majority, we tend to like the system that brought us there. Parties are usually committed to this idea when they are out of office.

I make an appeal to have a referendum. Let the people of this country decide because there is growing interest in the community. There is a national organization called Fair Vote Canada. People want change. They want democracy. They want their will represented in the Parliament of Canada.

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion put forward by my colleague from the New Democratic Party. Essentially he is asking us to consult Canadians in a referendum on whether to replace our current electoral system with some form of what he refers to as proportional representation.

Specifically, just to get a hold of what he is advocating, he says that within one year we would have a referendum. This would be followed by a commission to consult Canadians on their preferred form of proportional representation and how it should be implemented, and all of this no later than January 1, 2006.

The motion really addresses two issues. The first is the process issue, whether we should call for a referendum on proportional representation. Of course we have not decided whether we want it yet. The second issue is whether we need to replace our present electoral system.

First, it is premature to speak on what kind of process should be used to consult Canadians on voting reform, whether it be by referendum or otherwise, before there has been any kind of informed debate on this issue. We are certainly getting ahead of ourselves a little here.

While the government of Quebec is considering reforming its electoral system, in B.C. a citizen's assembly will examine the B.C. electoral system and may recommend retaining the current voting system or perhaps adopting a new one. The Law Reform Commission of Canada has also been examining the issue of voting reform as part of its study of governance over the last few years, but it will only publish its report in 2004.

Therefore, the discussion has been engaged, and this is quite proper, but there is ongoing debate about our institution. Some will say that it is healthy for Canadians to discuss these matters and perhaps something that is healthy for the institution, however, the government cannot support a motion that calls for a referendum when the debate has barely been started. These are early days and Canadians have yet to give any indication that they desire a fundamental change of this kind. Before we talk about process then, it is paramount to undertake a balanced examination of the voting system, including our present first past the post system.

Canada's first past the post system has been a pillar of our institutional framework since pre-Confederation time. The first Parliament, in what is today Canada, was in Nova Scotia and it started in 1758. That is the system under which we started to elect members of Parliament. Our system has provided us with strong national governments that have been able to act decisively, to govern a diverse and very much decentralized country.

I believe the stability provided by our system is key to this debate. In particular, because of the unique characteristics of Canada, I believe it remains the best system for us. Good governance demands the ability to reconcile a tremendous range of differences in a federation: linguistic, regional, cultural and so on. One key problem with proportional representation models, at least with every model I have seen, even the so-called mixed ones that blend elements of both proportional representation and first past the post, is they barely result in a political party winning a majority of the votes.

The hon. member across has told us what he believes are the great values of minority government, presumably with himself and his colleagues holding the balance of power in that minority, and herein lies perhaps some of the motivation. Consequently these systems significantly reduce the likelihood of majority governments at the federal level.

Recent research by the Law Reform Commission of Canada has demonstrated some of this reality. The study found that even with a system that consists of only 20% of proportional representation, majority governments would only occur half as frequently in Canada. Canadians need to know these things before they make decisions.

The authors concluded that with proportional representation, minority governments would become the rule rather than the exception. Is that what we want? Canadians need to know these things. Do we want to create a system that deliberately creates minority governments all the time?

•(1045)

By contrast, in the 36 elections since 1867, using our current voting system, all but eight have brought us majority governments in the House of Commons. Sometimes it has been my party, which I like obviously, sometimes not. Sometimes it is somebody else's party but that is okay. That is a decision of the people of Canada.

Supply

Proponents of proportional representation argue that parties would simply form coalitions to govern and this would be just as effective in their view. It really makes one wonder then what the purpose is to go through the exercise if it is to create a new element of what we now call political parties by another name. My colleague, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, made this point during a speech he delivered at Carleton University last year.

Furthermore, our present system allows for the resolution of sensitive issues with a strong governing party. It does not matter whether they are issues of minority and so on. We have had some of those before us recently. A coalition government could result in divisive issues being aired out publicly on an ongoing basis. It would be very difficult to have the kind of force necessary to govern a country as diverse as ours.

I want to divert a little from some of the material that I have and talk about something the hon. member said. He used the example of New Zealand and somehow drew from that a parallel with Canada.

You and I, Mr. Speaker, come from an eastern of Ontario. The distance from Hawkesbury in my riding to the other side of Kenora near the Manitoba border is the same roughly as the distance between Montreal and Orlando, Florida. Therefore some of us would be represented by members of Parliament who come from as far away as from here to Orlando, Florida. Do we want to advocate a system like that with provinces the size of the ones we have in Canada? I have no idea why one would ever want to have that kind of element.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: That is in the Senate right now

Hon. Don Boudria: This has nothing to do with another chamber that is supposed to represent regions. Whether it does adequately is a debate for another time. We are not talking about that. We are talking about the House of Commons of Canada, not another institution. There is no parallel with that in any other country in the world.

The same applies in Quebec. Does a person in Hull want to be represented by someone from Chicoutimi? To put the point much better, does the person from Chicoutimi want to be represented by someone from Montreal who may have never even seen that community? That is the automatic result of a system like this.

The other issue is when we meet constituents, as we often do. When my constituent, Mr. René Berthiaume, introduces me to a relative or a friend he says "Hi, I want you to meet my MP" and he says my name. Regardless of the quantity, whether it is 20%, 30% or 50% it does not matter. MPs are elected only because they are on a party's list. I do not see the democratic value of that. The hon. member is saying to us that this results in more people participating in the electoral process.

This morning I had in my mail a book published by Queen's University about reforming parliamentary democracy, edited by Leslie Seidle and David C. Docherty. The report talks about the New Zealand example and how Professor Jonathan Boston did his work on that example.

● (1050)

I will quote from the report. It states:

As Boston cautions, it's too early to dissect all the ramifications of New Zealand's experiment with electoral reform. Certainly the power that was once enjoyed by a single party in power (and the front bench of the governing party) has been dispersed.

Therefore the only thing that has been achieved is that there ceases to be a majority government. It goes on to state, "Yet, according to Boston, the surge in public confidence that was hoped for has yet to materialize".

Therefore it did not result in increased voter participation. It did not even do that which is advocated by the hon. member. It is not the great panacea that it is supposed to be.

[*Translation*]

There is something else. During an election, whether in my riding, in the member opposite's or my colleague's riding, people send us to Ottawa to represent them for all sorts of reasons. Some might vote for me, Don Boudria. Some might think that I should be their MP; that is possible. Others vote for the Liberal Party.

I do not know why people voted for me. Did they vote for Don Boudria or for the Liberal Party? Some vote for the Liberal platform, while others vote for the Prime Minister. All I know is that when it is all added up, I am here in the House of Commons, as is the member opposite and everyone else here. All the votes for all these reasons are all added up.

In his proposal for proportional representation, the hon. member claims—and that is where he is mistaken, in my view—that all the votes for people who are not elected belong to the political party, that no one wanted to vote for the candidate, the platform or the leader and that all these people voted only for the party, at the expense of all other considerations. There is nothing to prove this.

If this is true, it is an insult to the members in this House. Does this mean that each and every one of us was elected based solely on the political party we represented in our ridings and for no other reason? Not a chance.

That is what we are being told. We are being told that all the residual votes are added to a list proportionate to the number of votes per party, and not proportionate to the popularity of the leaders, candidates or anything other than, of course, the parties. These votes belong, therefore, to the parties.

At this level, our constituents sometimes ask a few of us, "How come enough of you did not vote, independently of your colleagues on this bill or whatever, the way we expected you to?" There are all kinds of reasons why this can happen, such as the party platform or because of being a minister, and so on.

Whatever the case may be, these are the kinds of comments we hear from our constituents. The day we no longer have any constituents, how are we to vote against our party, should we decide to do so? What would automatically happen to us, the next time, on that list? Would we be 194th on the list the next time? This is inevitable.

Then the hon. member said that there are only two or three countries in the world, which he named, with a system similar to ours. This is nonsense.

In fact, France had a system based on proportional representation, and it got rid of it. Why? Because people could no longer relate to the members they had elected. France got rid of this system and now elects members to represent ridings. Yes, it is true that there is perhaps a second ballot. However, members are still elected to represent ridings, and not by proportional representation, in France's national assembly. I go two or three times a year, and I am well aware that France has no such system, although it once did.

Australia was mentioned as an example. Once again, this is not true. In Australia's Parliament, or the House of Representatives as it is officially called, members represent ridings only. There may be two ballots, but that is an entirely different debate; it is not proportional representation. Members represent constituents. They do not represent a territory that is 5,000 km long or anything like that. This is not the case in Australia either.

• (1055)

When the hon. member says that Canada, the U.S. and some other country were the only ones—he said that only two or three had the same system as ours—he was suggesting that the others had a proportional representation system.

That cannot even be said of Australia. We travelled to that country. The House leader for his party, who is sitting barely a metre away from him, was there with me to visit Australia's House of Representatives. Of course, Australian senators each represent a region, a state. They are elected based on the size of their states. But that is another debate. We are talking about the other house.

As for the members of the House of Representatives, they represent an electoral division and nothing else. To claim in this House, as the member did earlier, that it is any other way does not reflect the reality.

Some may say that the debate is worthwhile. The hon. member does have the right to bring any issue before the House for debate so that it can be discussed further. That is legitimate, if he thinks this is something that is viable.

I disagree. I think that the system we have is a good one and that it is worth keeping. We can improve our current system in a variety of ways. For instance, in our country, we have a bill before us—it is before the parliamentary committee; as a matter of fact, the meeting is about to start—to ensure that, in the various electoral districts of this country, the redistribution is effected in as near a future as possible. This way, the right of the people to representation by population will be recognized. We want to expedite the process, to change and improve it so that, as Canadians, as citizens of this country, we are better represented in the House of Commons. We want to make that process better. I even made that suggestion in this House a few days ago. But that is another debate.

If the hon. member wishes to talk about creating a system for the other place, let him go ahead. He said something like this, "Listen, as for the proportional system that exists in several countries, with respect to the upper house, we want to close it and include in this house the supplementary parliamentarians who would be elected by

Supply

the proportional system". In fact, what he is suggesting, if I understand the system he is proposing today, is that we have senators sitting in the House of Commons. A few moments ago, he gave a reply along those lines to the hon. member for Mississauga South.

These are some examples showing why I think the system he is proposing is not any better. It is not an improvement for our country. Whatever the outcome, proposing a national referendum on the issue in less than a year, when the debate has barely begun, and no evidence has been presented for his contentions, is clearly premature. In my opinion, we should not even think about going down the road to proportional representation. In any case, work is currently being done on reports that will be published later.

There are all kinds of other reforms that could be undertaken. We have implemented some together. As for improving the democratic process, Bill C-24, which we passed recently, proposed one improvement. That was to reduce dependence on large corporations and large unions and have individuals become more involved in the democratic process. That is one way to modernize Canada's Parliament, and this government did it. I must say that some hon. members opposite also voted in favour of these measures, and I thank them.

Bill C-49 proposes electoral redistribution so that we can benefit from what the commissions told us. That is one way to make improvements, and there are others.

But throwing it all out, to replace it with a proportional or semi-proportional hybrid system, or some other, is really going too fast. In any case, we are certainly not prepared to hold a referendum on this within a year or less.

• (1100)

[*English*]

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the minister, if we were to accept an amendment to remove the dates, would he support the motion before the House today? The minister is concerned about the dates being too rigid. I would certainly accept an amendment that we remove any reference about dates.

I also want to say to the minister that what I said was there were only three countries in the world with more than eight million people that use the pure first past the post system. In Australia there is PR in the Senate. France uses what is called the majoritarian system where there is a first vote and a second vote to make sure every member of parliament represents a majority of the people.

I think what the minister is trying to do is distort what I am saying, that we are one of the few countries in the world to use the pure first past the post system. It is a system that is archaic in the minds of most people right around the world.

Supply

Is he not concerned about the fact that we have these fake majorities? We have only had four majority governments elected by the majority of people going way back to 1921. The will of the people is just not represented in the House of Commons. Does that not concern him?

The other point I wanted to make is that in terms of proportional representation there are two principles. We have geographical representation which would remain, but we also need political representation. If there 20% of the people vote for a certain party, they deserve as well 20% of the representation in the House of Commons.

I want to ask the minister whether or not he would support our motion if we deleted any reference to the date of the referendum. Also does he have any concern about the fact that under our system a minority of the people elect the majority of the government, and a majority of the people vote for the opposition? To me that is not the will of the people.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I really disagree with the hon. member when he talks about the fact that he considers majority government to be what he says, a fake majority. That is disrespectful of the system. It is unnecessary and it is not the reality.

No one can tell me that the governments that were led by any leader—whether of my party or the Conservative Party, as those are the only two parties that we have had in the history of this country save and except right at the beginning where the names were a little more ambiguous—constitute anything less than legitimate majority governments.

Canada operates in a system where the government is in power so long as the government enjoys the support of the House of Commons, manifested by a majority of votes in the House. In other words, it is the confidence convention.

A party that has the majority of seats could even have opposition MPs supporting the government. That constitutes a majority. If the hon. member decided with his party to form a coalition with the government, or any other one in the future, perhaps one of another party, that government would be just as legitimate constitutionally.

The point I am making is that there is no such thing as a fake majority in the House. That majority is established. The hon. member will know it as well as I do. He is one of the few people who has been around here longer than I have; actually as a staffer, I think I was here before he was, but not by much, just a little before he was.

In any case, the member knows that at the beginning of the session there is a throne speech. On that throne speech after the second day of debate we have the vote. When the government has been blessed by the confidence vote of that particular exercise, only then are government bills introduced in the House.

The confidence of the majority is established that way. It does not matter whether MPs individually were elected by a small number of votes, or a very large number, which I have been blessed with from time to time I must say.

I do not consider myself more or less legitimate in the House than an MP who was elected in a recount. Once members are sent here we are all the same. All members have the same legitimacy. We all have

the right to represent our constituents, whether I was elected with 82% of the votes, which happened to me in 1993, or perhaps one colleague on the other side of the House who was elected in a recount. The legitimacy is the same. Once we take our oath of office and participate in that exercise we are the same in that regard.

Everyone considers us the same and that is only rightfully so. I will draw the analogy of hockey, as we sometimes do around here, and Mr. Speaker, I know you are familiar with that. Whether the playoffs are won with consecutive games or whether they are won with a tiebreaker on the last game, the winner still gets the Stanley Cup. The Stanley Cup here is our representing our constituents in the House. For members individually and collectively it is the same with the confidence that is established. Therefore, I cannot agree with the member's proposition.

Finally, to have a referendum at any time before we have even explored these options, which he is advocating and I do not even agree with, is premature, even to say that we will not have a referendum let alone the date.

• (1105)

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the minister has made his own opinion abundantly clear to the House, but why is he so opposed to letting his constituents air their views?

Is it because he thinks that he is more intelligent and he is wiser than they are and there is no way they can think for themselves about such an important subject? Is it because he thinks they would actually disagree with him and that he has to prevent that from happening at any cost, even if it means suppressing their right to a public debate about this issue?

Does he doubt his own ability in an open public forum to convince his constituents that he is correct? If he does not, why will he not agree with the idea of letting them speak? Why will he not give the rest of us, who he has just said are equal to him, an opportunity also to have that public debate and try to convince our constituents to agree with us?

I would like the minister to stand up and look into one of the cameras here and tell his constituents exactly what he thinks of them and why he will not allow them to have their say on this issue.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I will speak to the Chair and not to the camera.

My constituents know why I was sent here. I was sent here to represent them. I make no apology to represent them. I have asked for their permission to represent them. They decided that is what they wanted and they sent me here to do just that.

That short but concise diatribe does not contribute much to the debate on the other side. More fundamentally, the hon. member is asking, are my constituents not entitled to express their views. Of course they are. Our constituents send us here. This is a democratic exercise. We do not apologize for the fact that we are elected democratically.

To get back to the other point that he raised, I reiterate what I said. I make no distinction between colleagues based on the size of their majority. For 90% of them I would not even know what it was.

Supply

Does the hon. member think that when we have a meeting here or when we vote we say that member so and so has no right to stand because his or her majority was too small? It never comes up and if it did, Mr. Speaker, you would call us to order. That would be ridiculous.

All of us have the duty to consider the others in this chamber to be as equal as we are. Otherwise it would be translated in my view as saying their constituents are not equal. Their constituents sent them here to represent them in the House.

• (1110)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that the government House leader has suggested that the discussion on this issue has only just begun and that it would be premature for us to put the idea of having a referendum within a year before the House.

My question for the government House leader is, where has he been? In the time that I have been in the House, since 1997, we have had a couple of private member's motions by the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle. We have had several debates and lots of discussion. Furthermore the minister will know that this matter was discussed when Trudeau was the prime minister and subsequently it has been raised in parliamentary circles. In fact it is an area where the Canadian people seem to be way ahead of the Liberal government.

Where has the minister been? Does he not recognize that it is time now to determine the pulse of the Canadian people on this important issue?

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, in response to the first question of where I have been, I have been in the House of Commons of Canada representing the electors of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

The hon. member asked why we are not agreeing with her because this is her position. If the hon. member has the right to have her opinion, we have a right to have ours.

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it was clear from the minister's speech and his answers to the questions that his interpretation of representation for his constituents is actually representation for himself. He asks their permission to come here and then he does what he likes. To some of us that is offensive but I guess that is the way he operates. However to many of us that is not democracy and that is not democratic.

I would like to make further comments on some of the interventions made during the minister's speech when he said, for example, that he believes we already have the best system for this country, so he will not allow the people of Canada to let him know whether or not they agree with his opinion and that because he thinks it is too diverse and there are too many opinions here, he would not allow anybody else to contradict him. That is a very sad attitude.

Talk about *Animal Farm*, where some of the animals are more equal than others, that is exactly what we are hearing. The more equal animals, who sit on the front bench there, are making sure the other animals do not have any input at all into the way the government is running.

The minister's entire approach is based on, frankly, suppressing and burying public opinion in order that a program of social engineering can be carried out over there. It is like treating their

constituents like mushrooms: keep them in the dark and feed them on that stuff that starts with B and ends with T.

The fact is that the minister's entire attitude is one of arrogance and superiority, where he decides what is best and then to hell, excuse my language, with the consequences. He will just impose his opinion on everyone else.

I think the real reason for his opposition is that a system of proportional representation would dramatically change the representation in the House, which was already mentioned by the sponsor of the motion today. The fact is, for example, in the last election here in Ontario, more than 1.1 million votes were cast for the Canadian Alliance. If there had been a system of proportional representation in place, for that 25% of the votes cast in Ontario, 25% of the seats would have been for the Canadian Alliance. What a difference that would have made. The Liberals would not be able to stand there and say that the Canadian Alliance is a regional party or give the impression that it is when it is not. We had healthy representation in this province and we could have had 25% of the seats here if every one of our votes had been properly represented.

Turning to the motion itself, I would like to start out by reminding the House that we debated a very similar motion to the one now before us during private members' business in May 2000. That motion was also sponsored by the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle. I congratulated him at the time for having pretty much copied Canadian Alliance policy in terms of his suggested approach.

In fact, his party's policy has evolved somewhat over the years with respect to the issue, changing from being one of imposing a top down decision on the people of Canada that there should be proportional representation, to accepting the Canadian Alliance approach that we should give the people of Canada a say in this possible change to the electoral system.

The evolution of the NDP's policy has brought its position much closer to that of the Canadian Alliance model but there are still some small and very important differences when we compare our system with the NDP model.

Our suggested process would involve two referendums rather than one, with the first asking whether or not the people of Canada want a change. In that respect, it is the same as the NDP proposal. However we would then have a one year to eighteen month period of time when Elections Canada would take on the job of educating the people of Canada about the various options that would be available, because proportional representation comes in many different forms. Only by making the people aware of their options would we be able to go into our second referendum at the end of 12 or 18 months to choose the system that would replace this or to reintroduce first past the post. That was the process that was used in New Zealand.

I do not think we should assume automatically that we would have the same outcome here because, if the minister is correct, with a very large and diverse country like this, quite different from New Zealand, when we get into the public discussion, in which he has no confidence, we would probably find that people had some different ideas about how the proportionality should work and we could end up with a totally different choice at the end of that second referendum.

Supply

• (1115)

However it must be obvious to any neutral observer that anyone who opposes the right of taxpayers and voters to use referendums to take part in the decision making of government between elections—and I place Liberals in this category—typically argue without providing a scrap of evidence that referendums are divisive, when nothing could be more divisive than having a government with 100% of the power barely holding 40% of the popular vote. What is more divisive than when there is not proper representation in this place for the votes that were cast in the last election?

We only have to compare that to the use of referendums where we get a healthy public debate about an issue. Usually the emotions are very strong because the subjects are often controversial but at the end of the day there is a democratic vote and everybody accepts the outcome. Even the people who lose, generally speaking, will accept that democracy has overruled them for this time. It is a healthy exercise.

Plenty of countries allow that sort of process to occur. Switzerland obviously is the country that uses this tool the most. We do not see any wars or uprisings in Switzerland despite its multicultural and complex nature because referenda actually assist the public to air grievances, to hear other points of view and, in the end, to make the right decision for everybody.

Having a referendum would be a good way to approach this. It would overcome the so-called problems the minister has tried to invent where the diverse nature of this country would prevent us from choosing anything better than first past the post.

However the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle has already discovered that it is highly unlikely that the government today will support his motion. Once the minister has spoken, of course, everyone over there will fall into line and there is probably no hope at all that the vote will be in favour of this motion tonight.

I also would bring to the attention of the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle the fact that I cannot think of a single example anywhere where there has been a major change to the electoral system of a country without some sort of crisis, usually a financial, fiscal or political crisis.

New Zealand is an example the member has used and likes to use. The change to the electoral system only happened after a fiscal crisis, near bankruptcy of the country, which resulted in a huge reorganization of the government. That was what led to the two referenda culminating in the introduction of MMP, mixed member proportional, in New Zealand.

I might add that it was also the catalyst for the rejection of Socialist policies in New Zealand and an aggressive switch to a free market economy. Perhaps still more distressing for the NDP would be that it was a left wing government, the Labour Party in New Zealand, that actually introduced the sweeping changes to the market system in New Zealand. It was also the Labour Party that eliminated compulsory unionism and allowed workers to bargain directly with their employers for their wages in every industry, even those regulated by unions.

Unions in New Zealand now have to advertise for members and convince people that it is worth joining the union. When I was there last Christmas, I heard advertisements on radio from one union advertising a free toaster and free cable TV hook-up to try to entice members to join the union. What a healthy thing to happen. Unions are being put in the same category as any other business venture, charity or special interest. They have to convince the people that they are doing something worthwhile, that there is a value in joining them, instead of just having a compulsory extraction from the wages of a worker passed on to a union with no accountability. In New Zealand now the unions have to pay bold attention to the real needs of the members.

In terms of the topic under discussion, the only thing I can think of in recent times, which here in Canada would have constituted a crisis big enough to cause some sort of change in our electoral system, would be the cliff-hanger Quebec separation vote we had a few years ago. Had that vote succeeded it would have caused such an upheaval in our electoral system that even the Liberals would have had to face the reality that an overhaul of the electoral system was necessary. There would have been a very high probability of change at that time.

• (1120)

Thanks to the efforts of the official opposition pushing the government in directions it did not want to go, I think that crisis has been eliminated, at least for a while. We now have a much better business environment in Canada and even some lower taxes despite increases in fees in other areas. We probably will not have an opportunity for a major change to the electoral system in the near future.

As I said earlier, the motion before us today is similar to the Canadian Alliance policy except that we would allow all stages of the process to be controlled by the public. Instead of a committee of the House or some other committee being set up to determine which would be the best voting system, we would put that task to Elections Canada to educate the people of Canada about their options and then let them decide the system they wanted for their country. After all, it is their country. They are the people who pay our salaries and the salary of the minister over there who thinks he is here to represent himself.

Surely the people of Canada, whether we think they are right or wrong when they make their final decisions, have the right, because they pay the bills, to have a country formed in the image they desire. Surely they have the right to determine how they want their country run. This would be a great opportunity for them to tell us how we should be running this place.

The reason we, in the former Reform Party and now the Canadian Alliance, reached our position on how to approach this whole issue was that at our policy conventions in past years people have always come forward with suggestions that we should promote a specific policy on proportional representation. The problem is that because there are so many different methods, people get very wedded and set on a particular system. It was difficult to have a debate in the convention atmosphere and actually make a decision about the kind of system we should take as policy.

We set about setting up a task force to study the issue within our party. We called all the people with different views before that task force. In the end, we decided that the best process was the one that was used in New Zealand where the people actually wanted the system changed. Maybe the minister is right, maybe people do not want it changed, in which case we finish the exercise, but if the people of Canada were to decide in a referendum that they wanted the system changed, then the next step would be to allow all the people who think they have the best system to promote that system in a widespread public discussion with the assistance of Elections Canada, and then we would see what the people of Canada would choose. Of course, first past the post would still be on the ballot at that time.

I must say that I am a bit troubled by the NDP proposal to have a committee actually decide which system would be more appropriate. What is the motivation for taking away the decision making ability of the public in this respect? Surely true believers in a democracy would trust the people to choose their own system to replace first past the post.

On balance, we can probably support the motion because if there is openness at that committee, we could probably convince it to create a situation where it could put its decisions out to the people in a second referendum. The opportunity is still available even with the type of motion before us today.

While I have time I should mention an interesting spinoff effect of what happened in New Zealand. The voters in New Zealand chose a mixed member proportional system where the House is divided in two. Half the members are elected using a first past the post system and the other half are selected from a list based on the proportion of the vote received by each party. The parties have to get 5% of the vote in order to get any members in the house. In the last two elections in New Zealand there were 30 or more parties on the ballot but only four or five managed to get 5% of the vote and actually become members in the house.

The interesting sidebar spinoff that I was going to mention is that with mixed member proportional representation some of the members of that house do not actually represent ridings because they are selected from a list provided by the party. As a result, the standing orders in the house in New Zealand had to be changed to refer to members by their names rather than their ridings.

• (1125)

It really begs the question why we have to refer to one another by our ridings, as I did earlier with the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle. There was no good reason to retain that rule in New Zealand, so it was scrapped. Everybody there calls other members directly by their names. I often have wondered why we need to persist with the archaic rule here.

Let me give a brief description of some of the options that New Zealanders had on the ballot.

Straight proportional is where everyone is elected based on a proportional percentage of the vote.

Then there is the supplementary member system, which is quite complex, under which most of the members, perhaps about four-fifths, are still elected on the first past the post and one-fifth, maybe

Supply

one-quarter, of the total would be elected based on a proportion of the overall share of the votes.

It can be a very complicated system in terms of allocating the votes to the parties because how do they decide who will get on the list of members and who will be on the proportional list or who will have to go before the electorate to be voted in first past the post. It could be a party list selected by party leaders. It could be a party list selected by the members of the party. It could be some sort of public selection process. There are numerous ways of doing that and it really becomes very complicated indeed.

Under the supplementary member system, usually there is a very small representation from smaller parties, so they still tend to get larger, dominant party structures in those types of governments.

Then there is preferential voting, which is not truly proportional but ensures that winning candidates get more than 50% of the vote.

The minister talked about the high percentage that he got and how he felt he was equal to somebody who maybe got 38% and won the seat in a first past the post.

Preferential voting would allow the voter to mark a first choice, second choice and third choice on the ballot. When all the votes are counted, if the first choice on the ballot does not get more than 50%, all the second choice ballots are counted and added to the totals of the candidates. Then, if somebody got 50% of the vote, that candidate wins.

I guess that gives some sort of certainty for voters that if they do not get their first choice, at least they get their second choice, in most cases, because usually by the second counting of the ballot someone has more than 50% of the vote.

Another system that is pretty complicated is the single transferable vote system. It is similar to preferential voting but it involves having numbers of members representing one riding. It could be anything from three to seven members in one riding. Therefore the ridings are much larger but they often give a representation of different parties in the one riding. For those constituents who feel a little uncomfortable perhaps dealing with a member from one party or the other, they have the option within the same riding to go to some other member. That system is used in Tasmania.

Then there is mixed member proportional which, I mentioned, was finally chosen in New Zealand. Under that system, it is actually the party brass who have chosen who will be on the list of members.

I guess there is a good argument for having a party chosen list for that group because the party obviously wants the opportunity to ensure that it has skilled people able to come to parliament. I will give an example. My colleague who was here in the first Parliament after 1993, Herb Grubel who was the member for West Vancouver, was an internationally recognized and very accomplished economist. He might for example be put on a party list so that the party would be certain that type of skill would come to the House after an election.

Supply

I guess the bottom line here though is whether I would recommend to my colleagues that they support the motion presently before us. I pointed out that one flaw perhaps is the decision on the type of system would be given to a committee. We would prefer the final decision to be made by the people of Canada rather than by a committee.

However, in reading the motion carefully, I get the impression that there might be flexibility for the committee to actually decide that there should be a second referendum and that the people should make the final decision.

Overall there are so many advantages to having this type of exercise, to having this type of discussion, that I am recommending support of this motion.

• (1130)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for North Vancouver for his comments. The debate we have had so far has been good because we have heard different kinds of options and possibilities.

In response to the member's suggestion about the motion put forward by the NDP today, the whole point of the motion is to allow a process to look at this issue, involve Canadians in the review of the issue of proportional representation and ensure that we have a representation of government that truly reflects how people feel and how they vote. Within our motion that possibility exists.

It may well be that citizens would be involved in the commission. There could be public hearings. There may be the possibility of a preliminary vote of some sort. Those are all things that would need to be discussed.

What we have to do today is to agree on whether there is an important principle here, and that is that the present system does not represent how Canadians feel about their elected representatives in the way they are voting.

What kind of feedback has the member had in his constituency and other places across Canada? I know, by the feedback I have received from people and in the e-mails I received, there is a great deal of interest outside of this chamber from members of the public who simply do not feel they are being represented by the current system. Of course, it is the oldest trick in the book for those in power to say, "This is a good system. It does well by me". However when we look at it from the point of view of voters and for Canadians who do not feel represented, then the principle is that we need to have that changed. Would he comment on that?

Mr. Ted White: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member that we have started off with a really good debate. We are hearing a lot about the technical aspects of electoral systems and how other countries have chosen different methods to that which we have here in Canada. I just think it is a shame that good debate will not be moved out of this House into the public arena because that would be very healthy.

Just before I answer another part of the member's question about what I hear in public, I should perhaps mention that if we were to go ahead and have a referendum, if the government would agree with the idea, maybe we should have a second question on that ballot about the Senate, the other place, and whether the people of Canada

want to abolish it, as the NDP would promote, or whether they would rather have a democratically elected Senate which also truly represented people by making senators accountable through the ballot box and also by having true representation across the country rather than political appointments to that place.

In terms of what I hear from my constituents, and I think perhaps the member would agree with me, there is not a spontaneous outpouring of feeling about this, but as soon as it is mentioned to somebody there is enthusiasm for a change.

I mentioned earlier that the Canadian Alliance received 25% of the votes in Ontario in the last election and what that would have represented in this place in terms of seats. If the people in Ontario, who voted Canadian Alliance or NDP or PC, had an opportunity to see that transferred into representation in this place, what a much more healthy environment it would be, instead of what we have here, the pretense that the government side somehow represents all of Ontario. It does not. It simply does not have that mandate at all.

The member is right that there is tremendous interest out there. It is not spontaneous yet, but I am really confident that if we had the opportunity to move this into the public arena, to have the debate out there, this would have been one of the most interesting, lively and enthusiastic debates we would have seen in the country in many years.

An hon. member: Since the Charlottetown accord.

Mr. Ted White: Since the Charlottetown accord, another member says. It would have been very healthy for the country to discuss whether there should be a change.

• (1135)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during his speech the member referred to the experience of New Zealand. I think he indicated there was as many as 30 different parties seeking to be elected.

I can almost imagine what a ballot would look like because I had the experience of being a UN observer at the first democratic election in Russia and it had about 47 parties, one being the beer party and a few others.

However it does raise the issue about the fact that there will be parties that represent maybe a narrow focus of interest. Clearly acknowledging that they would not form a government, they may have a populace view on something that may attract attention and get, say, the 5% which would allow them to get some of the proportionally distributed seats that would be left over. That certainly is a concern.

The other concern I would have with the New Zealand experience is one on which the maybe the member would comment. What does the legislative chamber of New Zealand look like and what is its dynamic when half the members, or a large number of members, are elected to represent ridings, some who come from a list of people who may themselves be unable to get elected on their own merit but happen to be there for other unknown reasons? It would seem to me that there may be a tendency to polarize people within the place which may lead to less homogeneity in terms of the dynamic of the house.

Supply

Mr. Ted White: Mr. Speaker, before commenting specifically on the New Zealand experience, the member mentioned that in Russia there were something like 47 parties on the ballot, and certainly in New Zealand there are more than 30.

He seemed to be disturbed by that. It does not disturb me a bit because I believe in democracy and I believe in the right of people to get out in the public domain and promote a cause. If they can get enough people to sign up to get on the ballot, let them get on the ballot. What is he afraid of? Does he feel that he is incapable of choosing out of a list of 30 which party he wants to vote for or is he afraid that perhaps some of constituents might choose somebody other than the ones he would approve? That is democracy.

Unfortunately we see on the government side of the House the desire to suppress small parties. For years, since the minister who spoke earlier came here in 1993, as minister he has tried to suppress the smaller parties in Canada with his 50 candidate rule.

We told him over and over from this side of the House it was anti-democratic to try to prevent small parties from running by saying they had to have 50 candidates. The courts at all the lower levels told the government the same thing. However he wasted hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars fighting it all the way up to the Supreme Court of Canada only to have the Supreme Court of Canada strike it down the bills he passed to suppress the activities of small parties. Even the Supreme Court of Canada told the minister that in a democratic country there is no place for that type of suppression.

What is wrong with having 40 different parties on the ballot? It is democracy and if they could all get elected to this place, so much the better. However general experience tells us that will not happen. Most of them are special interest groups that attract a few votes but they will not get into the place.

In terms of the New Zealand experience, and the dynamics in the house, actually rather than it being very polarized, I would say that most New Zealanders, certainly for the first term, complained that it was not polarized enough. They went from a very strict party type system to a more homogenous system where there was a lot of cross-voting, and it was quite different from what New Zealanders had experienced in the past. They did not like it in the first term. They seemed to prefer it in the second term, and it looks to me like MMP is there to stay in New Zealand.

• (1140)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to make one final point. Call me a bit cynical but a proposal that would put forward a list that would be controlled by parties makes me a bit nervous about possible manipulation, given the record of some of the old parties with patronage. Could the member could address that concern?

Mr. Ted White: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member. That is a great risk. I did mention some advantages of that type of system while I was speaking in terms of a previous member, Mr. Grubel, but my personal preference out of all the systems is actually the one used in Australia, the single transferrable ballot, because I think that gives legitimacy to a member who ends up with more than 50% of the vote.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle and the New Democratic Party for giving us an opportunity to debate an extremely important issue. I am referring to the motion put forward by the New Democratic Party, which reads:

That this House call upon the government to hold a referendum within one year to determine whether Canadians wish to replace the current electoral system with a system of proportional representation and, if so, to appoint a commission to consult Canadians on the preferred model of proportional representation and the process of implementation, with an implementation date no later than July 1, 2006.

As I mentioned, this gives us an opportunity to discuss in this House an issue that is extremely important to Quebec and the Bloc Québécois. In 1998, I chaired a Bloc Québécois working group on citizenship and democracy. We addressed the topic of electoral systems, more specifically proportional representation, but also other approaches such as a double ballot system.

We looked at this with the aim of improving our democratic life and ensuring each citizen of Quebec full citizenship—not just legal citizenship, but true citizenship—and more control over their democratic institutions. In this context, it is clear that proportional representation is an extremely interesting possibility. I will come back to this.

This debate is not new. Earlier, the government representative said it was premature. In Quebec, we have been discussing electoral systems, more specifically proportional representation, for 40 years. René Lévesque set up a commission, there was a discussion paper, and Robert Burns was put in charge of the consultation.

In the end, it all fell through because of the political realities in Quebec. Nonetheless, a lot was achieved. René Lévesque defended the idea of having proportional features in our electoral system in order to improve democracy through greater representation.

This has gone on for 40 years now. Just recently, the Parti Québécois government struck a committee to study the reform of its democratic institutions, chaired by Claude Béland. It undertook a broad consultation process, as well as holding the Estates general on the reform of democratic institutions. The first recommendation in the Béland committee's report, "La participation citoyenne au coeur des institutions démocratiques québécoises", bears a strange resemblance to the motion before us now.

That recommendation read as follows:

That the government note the public's very strong desire for a review of the current voting system, and give Quebecers the option of adopting by referendum, before the mid-point of the next government mandate, regional proportional representation:

They then went on to propose a system.

Supply

So there is nothing new about this debate. It is not premature, but rather something that has been around for 40 years. It is high time some progress was made. The Liberal government of new Quebec premier Charest has made a commitment to follow up, at least in part, on the report tabled by the steering committee on the reform of democratic institutions.

Clearly, the Bloc Québécois reflections relate to our option, that is the sovereignty of Quebec. For us, reform of the voting system in Quebec is an occasion to not only improve democratic life in Quebec but also to steer Quebec toward the full realization of its potential as a nation, that is toward sovereignty. We are therefore defending this concept, while proposing a certain number of mechanisms, to which I shall return later.

The NDP has taken the initiative of this debate within a Canadian framework and we will, of course, be bringing our own perspective into that debate, that is defending the interests of Quebec. We have never had any ideas about taking the initiative to reform Canada; we want out. Neither do we want to prevent Canada from improving its democratic life and a number of its policies.

●(1145)

In fact, we have never hesitated to support reforms or motions, whether from the government or from the opposition, that were aimed at improving the living conditions not only of Quebecers, but of Canadians as well.

It is in that context that we are taking part in this debate. We believe indeed that changing the electoral system at the national level could improve democracy and give a stronger voice to Quebecers, even within the present federalist system. This will be the thrust of our speeches.

There are certainly a number of aspects to consider. For example, the recent re-drawing of electoral boundaries, which has been and is still being forced upon us, does not meet the objectives stated in the NDP motion. In the case of Quebec, for example, its relative political clout is reduced with the new boundaries.

It is clear that, should there be a change to make our electoral system proportional or something along these lines, the Bloc Québécois would defend Quebec's interests in ensuring that Quebec's political clout would not be reduced by such a reform the same way it was reduced with the re-drawing of electoral boundaries. I would remind members that we will have 308 seats, including 75 from Quebec, which is certainly less than the proportion of the population that Quebec represents, especially in light of the fact—and I will come back to this—that we are a nation within the Canadian framework and that Quebec's specificity has to be recognized. I should have said that it “should have been” recognized because we know full well that this is impossible within the current federal framework. This is why we promote the sovereignist option. Quebec achieving sovereignty would solve this problem once and for all.

We have to move toward reform. It is an important issue for Quebecers, but also for all Canadians.

We have to remember what democracy is all about. I think everyone would agree that the best definition is the one used by Abraham Lincoln. He said “Democracy is the government of the

people, by the people, for the people”. It is an all-encompassing definition, because it is not only the government “of the people”, or the government “by the people”, or the government “for the people”. To have democracy, all three elements are required.

Of course, this definition clearly sets democracy apart from the other forms of government that have existed throughout history, such as monarchy, oligarchy and plutocracy. Not only that, but it also includes the three elements essential to democracy.

Let us consider the first element, the government of the people. What people are we talking about here? The white male majority? I doubt that is still what is meant by this nowadays. Are we talking about the Canadian people, which does not recognize the existence within its own borders of various nations? And not only of the Quebec nation, but also of the Acadian nation and the first nations.

Civil society knows better. In fact, planning is underway for a social forum of the peoples or nations of Canada to be held in Montreal, in June of 2004. Civil society, even in Canada, recognizes the existence of several nations within the political entity called Canada.

Therefore, while reforming the voting system, we would have to take that into consideration and not treat all of the provinces the same way, especially those, like Quebec and the Quebec people, which are the cradle of a nation.

Now, we know that a people is made up of varying interests and that this is enriched by it. I often hear politicians run down so called pressure groups, and the concept of civil society. But civil society—people organized in various groups or associations—is a necessary part of democracy. There can be no real democracy without civil society; I am thinking about countries like Haiti for example.

The people must be able to organize in unions, in community groups. To democratize political life, the organization of civil society must be promoted. Obviously, this must not be done at the cost of the power each citizen must have in a democracy. Indeed, one vote must carry the same weight as another vote.

●(1150)

In this context, it seems to me that proportional representation, or rather electoral reform to ensure proportional representation, be it through elements of proportional representation or any other formula, improves public involvement and that of the various groups and individuals that make up the public. It advances democracy. The proportional system does provide for a better representation of the various schools of thought within the population. It allows these groups to have hope, and in our case, to have one or more representatives in the National Assembly or in the House of Commons.

In the current system, the first past the post system, third parties have virtually no chance of being represented. This turns people off politics, resulting in a portion of the population preferring to advocate their chosen options through groups other than political parties. We can see it. It is clear to everyone. There is currently a certain disparagement of partisan politics, because it is obvious that a whole series of concerns are not being reflected in this House. Why would individuals or groups bother getting involved in politics if they believe they do not stand a chance to ever be represented in the House of Commons?

Consequently, proportional representation and improved representation in this House will ensure that the entire population has more control over our democracy. This also means that we must find out who the voters are. This is particularly true at the federal level. Voter turnout has declined with each election. I could give the figures I have here on voter turnout.

For example, in 1988, 75% of the electorate voted in the federal election. In 1993, voter turnout declined to 69%. In 1997, it was 67%. Finally, in 2000, it was 61%. As politicians and supporters of democracy, it is impossible not to be affected by these figures. To a large extent, this disinterest stems from the fact that various political movements in Canada and Quebec do not feel they will ever be represented in the House, given the current electoral system.

Furthermore, democracy is a means to resolve our conflicts, in terms of the public. We must not deny the existence of diverging interests within our societies. Democracy gives us a way to avoid confrontation, including violent confrontation, through a process that allows the majority to choose from a number of options. But our democracy must be sound to properly fulfill this function.

Abraham Lincoln said, in relation to democracy, that it is the government of the people, but also by the people. It is important to understand that if we want the people to be represented, we need, as I said earlier, a democracy that represents the overall interests of Canadians and Quebecers. This, however, is not enough.

We must also consider that, within this democracy we share, there is not only this representative democracy in which the political parties play an essential role, but there is also participatory democracy. Once again, this participatory democracy imposes a certain number of conditions. One of these conditions—and this is true in nearly all the industrialized countries except for Canada—is the decentralization of powers.

What we have here is an aberration that has been going on since the second world war, if not longer. The federal government is taking on increasing responsibilities. We have spoken of this many times. The fiscal imbalance makes this possible. Since Ottawa has more money than it needs to fulfill its responsibilities, it uses this money to interfere in provincial jurisdictions, especially those of Quebec.

It is clear that for Canada, perhaps, this does not pose a problem in the political sense, since the Canadian nation views the federal government as its government, and therefore, it is the responsibility of the federal government to build the Canadian nation. Unfortunately, this is to the detriment of Quebec, the Quebec nation in fact, because this nation is not recognized with Confederation, within the Canadian federation.

Supply

Nevertheless, even in countries where issues of nationhood do not arise, power has been decentralized towards the regions.

• (1155)

I think that the future prime minister's speeches are eloquent on this topic, when he talks about intervening directly with municipalities. This is quite the opposite of what is happening in the industrialized countries.

Local development must also be encouraged; in a participatory democracy, the institutions themselves must be democratized. MPs have an extremely important role to play. Even the future prime minister admits that the House of Commons currently suffers from a democratic deficit.

With proportional representation, the role of the member of Parliament changes and becomes more highly valued. This would be another element in the democratization of institutions, which is necessary in order to have true government by the people.

Finally, there must also be government for the people. That means that democracy is an essential value and that the fight for it must never stop, because democracy is not something that is given to us once and for all. For example, members will recall the coup d'état in Chile in 1973, against President Allende, who had been democratically elected. Many of us were afraid, when President Lula of Brazil was elected, that certain foreign powers, who shall remain nameless, would intervene in the electoral process. That did not happen, and so much the better.

Democracy is not something one is given once and keeps forever. It is something that we must fight to preserve. It is more than a mere value; it is also a means. We must ensure that democracy is used to meet the objectives we have set for ourselves as a society. This requires a plurality of views.

Looking at the Liberal Party of Canada, there are a number of MPs sitting under the Liberal banner who should be in another political party, because of our first past the post system. This was evident during some of the debates on certain fundamental values: they are conservative. They ought to be in a party that reflects their ideas, which are more conservative than those of the bulk of the Liberal cabinet.

But since they realize they likely have no chance at all of getting elected as members of another party, they prefer to wear the Liberal label, which gives them the chance to get elected in their ridings. As a result of this, the nature of this Parliament is distorted.

Supply

I knew Jean-Claude Malépart well. He was the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie and died of cancer. Our leader took over his riding, thereby becoming the first sovereigntist MP from Quebec. Mr. Malépart used to say that, basically, he espoused the ideas of the NDP, but realized that if he ran under the NDP banner in Quebec—that being before the Bloc Québécois came into existence—he would not have much chance of getting elected. He told me he was essentially a social democrat, but was obliged to run under the Liberal banner if he wanted to have any chance of getting elected.

I feel that this is an illustration of the distortion that results from the first past the post system. In order for us to have a government for the people, the House of Commons must be representative of all interests, in order to democratically decide, with a majority, what our objectives as a society should be.

In closing, I will just state that proportionality is a societal choice. It is the choice in the majority of the 53 most stable democracies. Of these, 25 have opted for proportional representation, in whole or in part, and only 15 plurality, while another 13 have a combination of the two.

We are the exception, not the rule. A broad debate is necessary. I think that the NDP's proposal paves the way for such a debate. For democracy to be improved, each vote has to carry the same weight, electoral results have to reflect the different currents of Canadian and Quebec society as closely as possible, the quality of our democratic life has to be improved and there has to be better representation. Proportional representation, through the parties' responsibility of putting together lists, will foster the representation of women and ethnic minorities in this House.

• (1200)

For us, it is essential—and I will end on this—to maintain a balance between regional and local representation. We think there should be discussions about this system. That is what we have proposed for Quebec. The important link between members and the regions, between members and local communities, should be taken into account. Now all sorts of approaches are possible.

I think the New Democratic Party's motion allows us to have this important debate. It is in that context that we will be voting in favour of the motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was following very carefully the comments made by my colleague from the Bloc Québécois. My question has to do with his mentioning that we need to have proportional representation for certain groups for members of Parliament.

In our system we do not elect the party leaders. The members of the party elect their own leadership. That will happen for the Liberal Party on November 14 and 15. I am sure the members of the Bloc Québécois will elect their own leadership for their party. The party leadership will decide who will go on the list. At the end of the day, people will have no say on who is going to be on the list except the members who are party to the leadership chosen by the members. I wonder if the hon. member agrees with me that it is possible the person chosen by this system would be more accountable to the

leadership of his or her own party rather than people in general, the way it is now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I think that electoral reform will bring about a complete change in political habits, that is to say the introduction of political practices completely different from existing ones. I gave examples of distortions created by the current system.

I believe there has to be a way for the proportional system to allow this relationship between citizens and elected members, even in a proportional system. It think that a mixed or weighted proportional system would do that. This is what the steering committee on the reform of democratic institutions recommended, that a number of members be elected in each riding and those on the list be elected on a regional basis. They would be accountable to the citizens of their respective regions.

These are terms and conditions. I think that the approach proposed by the NDP would address all of these very real difficulties.

I also disagree with the idea of MPs being answerable only to their political party. But at the same time, I cannot accept that, like the National Assembly to some extent, this House of ours would not reflect the various schools of thought found in the Canadian and Quebec societies. There is a balance to strike. Consequently, I do not share the view that proportional representation, pure and simple, is desirable, because it takes away much of the influence citizens have on their representatives. But these are terms and conditions. I think that, when it comes to our democratic life, we could come up with a system much more effective than the current one.

• (1205)

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's comments. I would like to compliment the Bloc Québécois on its ability to have women as a good percentage of its members. We in the New Democratic Party as well work very hard at having close to equal representation of women in the House. We are at about 40% and I believe the Bloc is as well.

I was very interested when I went to Scotland a couple of years ago to see that it has a system of PR. Women are 40% of that house of representation. It is a very exciting feeling, different from this place, which now has 20% women. My question for the member is, how does he see some kind of proportional representation system assisting in redressing the great imbalance that now exists in this House around equity between men and women?

Supply

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her compliment. Clearly, the Bloc Québécois, particularly our leader, is greatly concerned about women's participation. He struck a committee to recruit the greatest possible number of women to represent the Bloc Québécois in the next federal election. The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville in this House is co-chairing this committee along with the hon. member for Longueuil.

How will proportional representation ensure that there is better participation by women? In terms of Quebec, we focused in particular on the National Assembly, which currently has 125 members. What if 75 were elected based on revised ridings where traditional rules apply, and the other 50 members were elected based on proportional representation, with regionalization being another factor. The political parties would then be responsible for establishing priority lists of candidates. Should a party not provide a list with a sufficient number of women candidates, including key positions for women, the public would see just how committed that party was to ensuring greater participation by women in the National Assembly.

The same goes for ethno-cultural communities. I think that we are working extremely hard, and it is not easy to ensure equitable representation in this regard. We are experiencing objective difficulties.

In a system based on proportional representation, each party would be responsible for presenting its list of candidates. Consequently, this would be an indication of each party's commitment. If, for example, the top ten candidates included two women, in ninth and tenth place, it would be clear that these women have only been included for electoral and opportunistic considerations, since the two often go hand in hand.

If, however, the top five candidates, including the number one spot, included one woman and some young people or groups traditionally at a disadvantage in a first past the post system, this would show how important this is to that party. Furthermore, this would enable political parties to become true arenas of political involvement for these groups.

This is true for women, but also for other groups, in particular young people and so forth, who do not believe that the current structure of political parties allows them to be elected or to elect candidates that better represent who they are or what they believe in.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the speech by the hon. member for Joliette. It was like listening to a lecture in applied democracy. It was an extremely interesting speech.

For example, he told us that democracy is government of the people, by the people and for the people. He talked about retroactive participation and participatory democracy.

With respect to electoral redistribution, I would like to ask him a question. What really still upsets me is that regions like mine will lose a member of Parliament. It is true as well in Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, and both are regions which, in my opinion, need stronger

representation. I am thinking of the native communities in the north of my riding.

I would like him to tell me if proportionality would have any chance of correcting these errors in democratic administration. In fact, in our area, we are hardly even a democracy. In an area of some 38,000 km², where there are native people who have the right to be represented but their representative barely has time to meet them, that is certainly not an active form of democracy.

I would like to hear what he has to say on this subject.

• (1210)

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Champlain for his question, because this allows me to come back to something that is extremely important.

That is why I was saying that while I agree with changing the voting process to proportional representation, other factors have to be considered. That is the approach the Bloc Québécois is suggesting.

That said, we do not have an immediate solution. However, the regions have to be properly represented. This may mean that we should promote the representation of a certain number of regions beyond normal parameters, if we applied the simple one voter, one vote criterion.

We must also consider the fact that Canada is made up of different nations. I have said so. Unfortunately, the House does not recognize this, and neither does Canada. This will make it very difficult to change to a proportional type electoral system—to make any change, for that matter. The Quebec nation was disadvantaged by electoral redistribution. We lost political weight, relatively speaking, which is a further argument for sovereignty.

As for aboriginals, since the party draws up a list of candidates, each party could have representatives from first nations communities among its top candidates, as I mentioned earlier for women and ethnic communities. This would allow them to be represented. Often they are not represented because they are, to some extent, spread out across Quebec. Consequently, they are never, or rarely, a true political force in their region.

[*English*]

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, PC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party, I am pleased to take part in the supply motion debate. The motion posed by the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle deserves to be read again. It is:

That this House call upon the government to hold a referendum within one year to determine whether Canadians wish to replace the current electoral system with a system of proportional representation and, if so, to appoint a commission to consult Canadians on the preferred model of proportional representation and the process of implementation, with an implementation date no later than July 1, 2006.

Since the debate today is about elections, I want to take a moment to draw the attention of the House to two related events that occurred yesterday.

Supply

The premier of Newfoundland, after doing a dilatory dance of the seven veils all summer, finally called an election in that province. Our national caucus met in St. John's earlier this month. It was clear to all of us that change was in the air. I can tell the House that Danny Williams will make a fine premier of Newfoundland.

Yesterday the people of Prince Edward Island went to the polls and re-elected Premier Pat Binns and his Progressive Conservative colleagues. This is Premier Binns' third consecutive victory, a remarkable and historic achievement indeed.

The real story of the election in Prince Edward Island is that it was conducted in the wake of a devastating hurricane that struck the night before polling. Approximately 44,000 Islanders were without electricity. Trees blocked roadways. Houses and vehicles were damaged and boats were sunk. What did Islanders do on that hurricane election day? They went to the polls. They cast their votes. They voted, like most Canadians. More than 80,000 people voted. The voter turnout was over 83%. All of us should salute the people of Prince Edward Island with 83% voter turnout the morning after that savage storm.

I should also point out that Prince Edward Island still uses door to door enumerators for its elections rather than the flawed system of no enumeration and a permanent list for federal elections. There was an 83% turnout. Federally we are nearing 60% with a permanent list.

Turning to the motion, I congratulate the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle for his persistence in bringing it to the House. He has fought for years to bring forward a debate on proportional representation.

At a Progressive Conservative Party meeting in Edmonton in August 2002, we debated a report on democratic reform. That report was a concrete achievement for the PC/DR coalition. The position of the Progressive Conservative Party adopted at Edmonton is:

Upon formation of government, a commission will be immediately struck to hold public consultation on the most appropriate electoral system for Canada. The commission will be empowered to make recommendations to Parliament regarding any changes in the electoral system. Parliament, if possible, will implement changes in time for the next election.

We agree with the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle when he says there needs to be a public debate on this issue. As the people of Prince Edward Island showed yesterday, Canadians do take their franchise seriously and we should have a system that allows them full expression of their wishes. We also need a system that will allow for the governance of a very large and complex national society.

The member for Regina—Qu'Appelle engaged his party on the general use of proportional representation about four years ago. Thus far he has not defined a system, and I think it is fair to say, he has not engaged the wider community in a detailed discussion about systems. He is still at the first step. He wants a debate on an undefined system of proportional representation, but that debate is not now taking place around the kitchen tables in Canada. In fact, where he comes from the debate is about BSE and what the government is doing about it to make sure that the cattle producers stay in business.

Proportional representation has some merits. It also has some negatives. It significantly increases the power of the party elite and those who decide who gets on a list of party nominees. Some feel it

favours the status quo and party veterans. Canadians are not talking about the merits of this or that system of proportional representation.

● (1215)

The motion calls on the government to hold a referendum and then to flesh out a system of proportional representation for Canada. Here is where the proposal fails. In order to have a meaningful referendum, the population must be informed and there must be, to use a phrase of a few years ago, clarity in the question. People have to know what they are voting for or against.

The motion calls upon the government to ask Canadians if they want to trash the present system and opt for an undefined system of PR and then the country will embark upon the job of defining a new system. Experience shows that Canadians sometimes find it difficult to agree on things. Is it wise to further erode the existing system, flawed as it may be, without having a decision on a replacement system? The community needs to know what the precise alternative is before they vote in a referendum.

At the same Edmonton policy conference on democratic reform, the PC Party also considered the use of referenda. Let me quote from chapter nine of the report which deals with referenda:

Progressive Conservative MP Patrick Boyer told the House of Commons on 18 June, 1991: "I think it is highly appropriate, from time to time—not on every question, certainly not, but on those issues of transcending national importance—to put the question to people so that they can all become involved in this and get out of themselves and express their feelings on the issue. Ventilation on some of these issues is a very important part of Canada's nature as a democracy."

Another proposal is government sponsored referenda. Only three national referenda have been held in Canadian history, in 1898 on prohibition, in 1942 on conscription, and in 1992 on the Charlottetown accord. While they ought not to be used lightly, it may be thought that the Canadian people could preferably be consulted more frequently than every 50 years or so.

The federal Referendum Act, enacted June 23, 1992 by the Mulroney government in preparation for the referendum on the Charlottetown accord, provides a strong framework. For example, it stipulates that the question must be able to be answered by a yes or no, that a referendum may not be held simultaneous with a federal election, that the Canada Elections Act applies, and that three days of debate will be held on the question in the House of Commons.

The Progressive Conservative Party supports government sponsored referenda in two circumstances.

The first example is in the case of constitutional amendments. Two provinces, Alberta and British Columbia, already require that proposed constitutional amendments be approved in a referendum, and the Charlottetown accord has almost made this an unwritten convention. We would recognize this requirement. Passage in a referendum would require support from voters according to the appropriate constitutional amending formula, i.e., the different requirements for amendments under sections 38, 41 and 43.

The second example is in the case of issues of transcending national importance, to use Patrick Boyer's expression, where the federal government judged that legitimacy for a specific legislative proposal requires direct approval by voters. The government could also seek guidance from Canadians at the outset of a nationally important policy discussion as to whether legislation ought to follow and what form it should take.

As well intended as it may be, the motion calls for a referendum to put an end to the existing electoral system without placing a specific legislative proposal before Canadians. That is the flaw in the member's motion.

We agree that we need to debate possible changes to the system, both here in Parliament and in the community, if the community wants to engage in that debate. It would be folly to force a process debate on Canadians if they do not want one. They have other issues on their minds. Judging by the mail in my office and my conversations with constituents, this is not their number one issue. The number one issue in my riding of Dauphin—Swan River is mad cow, or BSE. Another is the proposed same sex marriage legislation.

• (1220)

But if there is to be change, it is time to hold a referendum only when there is a concrete alternative to place before voters. We do not think it is the time to ask voters to dismantle one system without having something to offer as a replacement.

At the same meeting in Edmonton, which the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle referred to, under chapter 12, this is what we concluded in the Progressive Conservative Party platform when we talked about an electoral system:

The plurality system of elections (commonly known as "first-past-the-post") has been a feature of many liberal democracies, including Canada. Dysfunctional aspects of plurality systems have led most liberal democracies to adopt other vote counting rules. Even the United Kingdom, the birthplace of many of our institutions and practices, is seriously considering change. Only the United States and Canada seemed to be wedded to the status quo, though in both there are calls for reform and, historically, there have been non-plurality elections.

No electoral system is perfect. For Canada, however, the plurality system has been so problematic that political scientists have produced volumes of critiques.

Simply, plurality elections create distortions between votes received by parties and seats won. Majority governments are created when parties fall far short of 50% of votes cast, indeed, short of 40%. Parties oriented toward certain parts of the country do better in terms of seats than do parties with national appeal, with more or less the same share of the votes. I think the current climate or environment of this House is a good example. Discrepancy between votes and seats exaggerates both the regional strengths and the weaknesses of parties, thus exacerbating regional tensions and conflicts.

Supply

Plurality systems from the perspective of voters are also a problem. A voter, instead of casting a genuine vote for the preferred party, will vote strategically in order to defeat another party. Voting should be an affirmation rather than a negation. As I indicated earlier, our preference is that a commission be struck to hold public consultations to find out just exactly what the community of Canadians is looking for.

Even more important than electoral reform is parliamentary reform. We need to look at it. We have heard parliamentary reform discussed in this House for probably over the last 20 years. It appears that very little reform has taken place. There are issues like free votes, confidence votes and party discipline in this House.

Again, at the Edmonton convention in August 2002, the Progressive Conservative Party had a position:

The importance of caucus solidarity in the British/Canadian parliamentary system has to be acknowledged. On it rests the integrity of a party's commitment to implement, in government, the platform on which it sought the support of the electorate. It is the means by which an MP respects his/her commitment to the party platform on which he/she was elected. Equally important in Canada, the party caucus is the indispensable parliamentary forum in which parliamentarians must reconcile different regional, cultural, social and economic perspectives in order to achieve a workable national consensus.

However, the commitment to party solidarity in Canada's House of Commons in modern times has been far beyond what is needed for the effective functioning of our parliamentary democracy. Its enforcement by party leaders and whips has been excessive to the point of demeaning MPs and of bringing the parliamentary process into disrepute.

Our proposal states:

the status, the dignity and the multiple loyalties of an individual MP—to his/her constituents, to his/her convictions, to his/her party, country and Parliament—must be respected. MPs, individually and collectively, can be trusted to decide how to honour each of these responsibilities in a particular instance.

Change in some parliamentary practices is essential. In particular: "Free votes", especially on amendments to government bills and at the 3rd reading stage of bills, should be the norm rather than the exception.

• (1225)

The policy also states:

To make this possible, the extravagant and unwarranted use by governments of the "confidence" convention, with its threat of dissolution and a new election in the event of losing a vote that is not explicitly designated as "non-confidence", must be severely curtailed.

Another issue that is very important to the House deals with standing committees of the House of Commons:

Standing Committees of the House of Commons, to whom all legislation is referred for detailed examination, and who can also undertake special policy studies, have become tools of Prime Ministerial patronage and, in a majority government situation, enforcers of the Government Whip's will.

Since the recent changes in parliamentarians' pay packages, the committee chairs and vice-chairs get extra pay, which has the effect of increasing the PM's control over his nominees. With the stroke of a pen, the whip can remove an independent-minded MP from a committee and replace him or her with someone more reliable. Need I say more?

We believe that:

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The ability of the House of Commons to hold the government accountable and to exercise its legislative supremacy must be restored. A large measure of autonomy, subject only to the authority of the House as a whole, must be given back to committees. In particular: MPs must be assigned to committees by vote of the House. Once there, they are "permanent", i.e. to serve until prorogation of that session of Parliament. An MP must co-sign any Whip's notice for his/her removal from a committee.

Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs must be elected by secret ballot of the members of the Committee.

Opposition parties should get a share of the Committee Chairmanships that is roughly equal to the share of seats they occupy in the House. This will be negotiated among House leaders.

Parliamentary secretaries and other MPs in receipt of extra pay (Whips, Caucus Chairs et al) should generally not be eligible for membership on Standing Committees.

Ministers should be required to remain at Committees while witnesses are heard on their bills and amendments are discussed. Ministers must be present through clause-by-clause consideration of their bills.

Let me conclude by saying that on the issue of proportional representation there is no doubt that it is about access to power. In a representative democracy like ours, elections are about power. Winners wield power. Losers and those not engaged in elections can be left behind. Proportional representation describes the voting system used in most democracies in which parties or individuals gain office in direct relation to their support among voters. Without doubt, PR is fairer than our current system, but in our particular case we do not know what system the NDP is advocating.

Of equal importance, proportional representation makes power more accessible by increasing the number of effective votes and the diversity of winners. In our current system, most elected officials, including members of the House, come from single member constituencies where winning is required to gain the most votes in the constituency, up to 50% of the votes or, as we always say, 50% plus one.

Our system results in greater injustice to any person voting with people who are in a permanent minority in the single member constituency, like members of the NDP. Such groups have little power and, as a result, do not have their interests addressed or even taken seriously. They also have little chance to change the majority's view.

I will conclude by saying that because this motion says the referendum must be held within one year, the Progressive Conservative Party will be voting against the motion. As I indicated earlier, the cost of a referendum separate from an election dictates that it should be held at the same time as the next federal election. It is debatable that the population can be informed in time of all the options, benefits and pitfalls of such a system.

• (1230)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member from the Conservative Party for his comments, but I think it is regrettable that he seems to be suggesting that Conservative members will not be supporting the motion because somehow they cannot agree that a referendum should be held within a year or that it should be held separate from an election.

It is regrettable because I think there is a very important principle being debated today in the House. It is the principle that we need to devise and engage with Canadians in a discussion about a system

that will truly reflect how people are voting. I think the member would probably agree with that. I listened to his remarks very carefully and it seemed to me that he was expressing a lot of concern about our present first past the post system.

I would ask the member to take a look at the motion before us today and to consider the fact that within the motion, by saying that a referendum be held within a year on the principle of changing the present system to proportional representation, surely within that process it would be an incredibly enriching experience to have a debate out in the community, in the public realm, in the House, before we even get to a referendum.

That debate is actually already taking place across Canada. There are organizations campaigning on an idea of PR. The idea of actually having an open discussion beyond what is taking place here in the debate today is something that I think is very important. It seems to me that this is where the opportunity lies to actually engage with people and to deal with some of the questions the hon. member raised in terms of party representation and how that works. Then there would still be a later process to actually look at the preferred model.

Does the member agree that this kind of public consultation would be a very important part of a process before we got to a referendum? Would the member not support the motion on that basis?

Mr. Inky Mark: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question and I do not refute the fact that there are a lot of advantages to proportional representation. Proportional representation certainly leads to more diverse representation. Members would also run cleaner campaigns, campaigns based on issues, not mudslinging. There is no doubt it would have an impact in the event that it would reduce the effects of big money.

But I think that on this motion the NDP has it backwards. I believe the commission to consult with Canadians should be set up first. As members know, we are basically in pre-election mode right now, especially with the belief that we will have a spring election in 2004. If the motion were to pass and it were to be implemented by the government, I do not see how all of this could happen.

Really, the commission planning should be presented to the House, options should be prepared and a vote held. Then we would have a better understanding. And Canadians need to have an understanding of the kind of system that we are planning on implementing.

• (1235)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate the member for Dauphin—Swan River for his participation in the debate. I will also say that we welcome him back to the House after a serious struggle dealing with a very critical health issue. We say we are glad he is back and looking in fine form.

Supply

With respect to the Conservative position on this very important issue of proportional representation, we have heard a lot of arguments from the member about why this cannot go ahead right now. Mainly, the member has focused on a lot of technical reasons. He has mentioned the exact wording of the referendum question, the type of proposition that is on the table and the time required to get there and all the other issues on our plates.

I agree with the member that this is not the first priority of the day in terms of what is at the top of the minds of Canadians. We know that there are Canadians everywhere who are concerned about mad cow disease. The impact on the farm community and the agricultural sector is serious and devastating and has to be addressed.

We know that, as we speak, out there in the hallways there is a furor building around the scandal involving George Radwanski. We want to see that issue dealt with immediately and expeditiously.

However, the question of proportional representation gets at the heart of all those issues in terms of giving voice to Canadians in such a way that they feel their voice matters and their vote counts. What we are really asking for today is for all members to look at this as a vehicle for a more effective representative mechanism, for a way for Canadians to feel a part of the political system and to play a meaningful role.

I would like to hear from the member what he really thinks about this as a concept in terms of dealing with the critical situation in democracy today. Never mind the technical reasons: What does the Conservative Party think in terms of the failings of democracy today and how we as a Parliament can address that serious and critical situation?

Mr. Inky Mark: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that this country is looking for change. When the Liberal government first came to power, it came in with something like 37% of the votes. That does not make any sense. The governing party was elected by one-third of the country and yet two-thirds of the country voted for those of us sitting on this side of the House. In the current political environment parties are all split up, but to make it worse, because of the first past the post system, we are all sitting on this side of the House.

The Progressive Conservative Party believes that there is a problem with the system. The system needs to be fixed. The first thing we would do if we formed the government would be to establish a commission which would hold public consultations on the most appropriate electoral system for Canada. In other words, we would put out some options for people to look at. The commission would be empowered to make recommendations to Parliament regarding any changes in the electoral system. If proportional representation was decided as the way to go, then that is the way we would go. Parliament, if possible, would implement changes in time for the next election.

We are in a pre-election mode right now, and are probably only eight months away from an election. To ask the government to call for a referendum on this question is unrealistic. We could support the second part of the resolution, but certainly not the first part.

• (1240)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that the Conservatives agree with the New

Democratic Party that there is a problem with the electoral system of the day. Now we say to the Conservatives to get on board with this important initiative, this significant and constructive suggestion.

This motion is recommending a process by which we can hear directly from Canadians on the fundamental issue of how our electoral system is to be organized and how Parliament is prepared to deal with the shortcomings in our political system. It is having serious and long term lasting effects in terms of efficacy, citizen participation and participatory democracy.

Let me say before I forget that I will be sharing my time with the member for Vancouver East.

This is an historic day. As the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle said, this will be the first time since 1923 that Parliament will vote on a matter pertaining to changes in our electoral system and specifically in terms of a proportional representation model presented to Parliament.

It is historic and we need to remind Canadians that the vote tonight will be an important indication of how all parliamentarians feel about the growing concern and unease among Canadians about our system. Canadians feel like they do not have a meaningful say any longer in the political affairs of this land.

It is a critical day. It is a very important day and I want to congratulate the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle for his persistence on this issue over the years. He has diligently brought forward two private members' bills to this House since I was elected since 1977. We had a couple of debates in this place. The New Democratic Party had previously sponsored a similar opposition day motion, so this is not some fly-by-night kind of scheme. This is not, as the government House leader would suggest, some new topic up for discussion. This has long been on our political agenda. It is very much on the minds of Canadians and is at the heart of our democratic system.

I would suggest that members in the Liberal Party today consider carefully the purpose of this vote and the ramifications for what will transpire when that vote occurs. We are signalling to Canadians that we want to hear from them about changes to our political system. We want to pursue what Canadians believe is very much a part of greater participation in our political system today.

I am pleased with some of the opposition support, the support of the Bloc and the Alliance. They have joined us in recognizing the need to advance this issue to a referendum, and to have a serious discussion to study the options and to evolve our system accordingly. It is especially admirable for the Alliance and the Bloc to be supportive today because those two parties are the least to benefit from a proportional representation system. In the 1993, 1997 and 2000 elections the percentage of votes received by those two parties translated into roughly the percentage of seats they received in this House.

It is a positive indication, on the part of representatives from those two parties, about the need to open up our minds to an issue that may be controversial. It may be tough, but it is critical at this time in our history.

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We are at the crossroads in terms of democracy. That is why this issue is so important today. We are at a crisis in terms of the faith of the public in our system and in terms of participation at the electoral level. Let us look at the last election. Fewer Canadians voted than ever before; 61% voted in the last election. That was the lowest level ever.

• (1245)

In fact, if we include the one million or so Canadians who were not registered, that drops to 58%. Internationally that puts us at a rank of 26 out of 29 of OECD countries. We are at the bottom in terms of citizen participation in general elections. Surely that should be enough for all of us to say something is wrong and that we must address the situation.

There are many reasons why voter participation has dropped off. We can blame Canadians and say Canadians are failing our electoral system, which will get us nowhere because it does not get at the root causes. Or we can ask, is our political system failing Canadians? That is precisely the issue we must grapple with today and why we have the motion before us.

We know the first past the post system does not serve democracy. It does not make people feel that their votes count and does not ensure that we have a system that translates votes into seats. There does not seem to be any reasonable concurrence between the two notions. That is what the debate is all about.

We must look at this not only because we have a serious crisis in democracy in terms of low voter participation. I hope all members agree that we have increasing balkanization in this country. The Liberals ought to realize it. In the last election they got about 21% of the vote in Alberta and two seats. Similarly, the Alliance got about 23% of the vote in Ontario and two seats. Something is wrong.

That contributes to balkanization and to the sense of western alienation. It contributes to an untenable political situation that must be addressed. It has the possibility of being addressed under proportional representation.

I want to focus on the need for proportional representation to be considered in terms of the issue of equality for women in this place. I suggest that a method of proportional representation is absolutely essential for ensuring greater participation of women in this place. It would give us the possibility of achieving gender parity, a goal that we have all held so long and dear, and which must be accomplished in our day and time.

We have made progress over the years, but we have come to sort of a halt, a standstill. We achieved 20% of women in this place in 1997 which was a breakthrough. We showed some progress. Did we build on that in the year 2000? No, we stayed at 20%. That is deplorable. It is unacceptable and must be changed.

Individual parties can do what they can to correct that and the New Democratic Party has implemented affirmative action policies. It makes a difference in terms of numbers of women. We cannot wait for the day for every political party to adopt that strategy. As a parliament and as an institution we must grapple with this and recommend changes to the electoral system and the structures around the democratic process.

Proportional representation does hold that possibility. It is not the be all and end all. It does take more than simply putting in place a proportional representation system. However, it does, as all the evidence suggests, lead to greater participation by women in the political system.

I want to refer to some of the evidence presented by some researchers in this area, particularly from Nancy Peckford who did a paper for the National Association of Women and the Law. She said:

But how would any of these systems affect the representation of women, or increase the ability of women from across all parties to pursue a feminist policy agenda? It is useful to note that of the 10 countries with the highest percentage of women in Parliaments, all have systems that include PR. Of the nine countries with no women in their legislatures, seven use the majority system, one has a mixed system and the other appoints members. Reasons women fare better in PR systems include the fact that the electorate in each district is not forced to choose between a male and female candidate...Furthermore, in other PR systems, strong women's movements have been able to mobilize parties, and in some instances governments, to mandate quotas, which ensure that women are better represented on lists.

I could go on with the literature and evidence. Needless to say, from the point of view of equality and gender parity in this place, it is an absolute goal that we must achieve.

• (1250)

I ask all members, especially those on the Liberal side, to look at this as an opportunity to accomplish a fundamental goal and as an opportunity to reflect growing concerns among Canadians about the state of our democracy. I ask all members to give this a chance, give equality in this place a chance and give participatory democracy a chance.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her passion as usual. It is an important debate. I do not think it should be dismissed as being radical at all because there are enough examples around the world.

While I find the member's argument with regard to the goal of gender parity laudable, I would remind her and Canadians that I do not think the 90% or more of the women who are currently in the House are here because they received any special treatment. They are here because they competed on a level playing field with everyone else who wanted to be here and they are here because of their credentials.

My question has to do with the examples that have been used by some of the many countries around the world. Italy has been mentioned. I have been led to believe that with the system that Italy has, it has had 48 elections in the last 50 years. It is a very significant statistic. It means that there is some level of instability within the system that bred over time.

I would like the member specifically to address what she believes is the state of the union in Italy under a proportional representation model and why.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, I must say that I find the member's comments quite offensive in terms of our suggestion that proportional representation is one way to address the imbalance on the basis of sex in this place.

It is unfortunate that a member like him would stand and suggest that we are suggesting anything but a level playing field. We are suggesting that the imbalance in the system be corrected by ensuring that we make the systemic changes that allow women to gain their rightful place in the House.

PR is not a way to hand women something they do not deserve. It is not about unqualified women getting elected. It is about ensuring that those women who are qualified, who have an interest in playing a role in the life of this Parliament and who want to give their talents to life in this country have a way to do so without facing discrimination, systemic barriers or cultural conditioning.

I resent those remarks. I suggest to him that he talk to some of his colleagues on the Liberal side and get an education about what barriers women face and why we need to change the system to make equality a reality here.

The member picks Italy's system out of all the countries on the list. Italy has a mixed system. There are some questions around Italy's system. We have not come here advocating the system that Italy uses. We have advocated looking at all the models and coming up with the best model for this country.

I suggest to the member that he look at the countries of Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, South Africa, Iceland, Austria, Switzerland and a number of other countries where proportional representation is their electoral system and in fact has led to a significant representation by women to the point where they are getting close to 50:50 in their legislative assemblies: Sweden has up to 41% women represented in its legislature; Finland has 39%; Norway has 36%; Denmark has 33%, and so on.

If the member believes in equality and is prepared to treat this matter seriously I would suggest that he recognize the importance of looking at proportional representation as a means by which we can ensure that faith in democracy is restored and the goal of gender parity, of equality in this place is achieved.

• (1255)

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am interested in the fact that 61% of Canadians voted and that we are at the bottom of the list in terms of citizen participation.

I would like the member to address the issue of relevancy of the House and how she feels that the nature of the system that we now have in place is dampening and depressing citizen participation.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, the crisis in democracy is critical, as reflected in the declining voter turnout in Canada today. We have to grapple with this or we will lose our institutions that have been founded on principles of openness, freedom and democracy.

I think the best way to capture what Canadians feel about our system and why it leads to such a malaise and profound feeling of a lack of being able to affect the system is by looking at the results of the last election. I believe the Liberals won 41% of the vote but they received 57% of the seats. That is crazy. It means that we have, in

Supply

effect, an electoral dictatorship because we do not have a system in place that reflects people's true intentions.

If we can correct that through our systems change, we could actually restore people's faith in democracy.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to participate in the debate today on the motion put forward by the New Democratic Party. It is an important debate and one on which we have had some good exchanges of opinions and ideas here in the House today.

I will begin my remarks by congratulating the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle who led off the debate in the House today. I think many people across the country know that the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle has kept this issue alive both here in Parliament and in the community with his courage, his commitment, his dedication and, I might also add, the research he has done.

When we talk about proportional representation, most people do not know what that means. They know the current system does not work, that it stinks and that they are not represented but they do not necessarily know what is out there or what is already working in other places, as we heard from the member for Winnipeg—North Centre.

I also thank the member Regina—Qu'Appelle and his staff, in working with groups like Fair Vote Canada, for producing such a wealth of information that people are actually able to get into the discussion and talk in an informed, open way about the choices we have before us.

I also thank Fair Vote Canada. For those who do not know, this is a national organization with chapters across the country. It is a non-partisan group that represents people from all political parties. I just attended a Fair Vote Canada meeting in Vancouver a couple of weeks ago where there were people of every political stripe. What brought those Canadians together, along with our member for Regina—Qu'Appelle who is part of Fair Vote Canada, was the understanding that our current system has failed us and Canadians, and that we needed to produce a new kind of electoral system that would actually represent Canadians in terms of how they vote, where they live and how they want to be represented.

I listened to the debate today from the government House leader. He told us that the system works very well, and he is right. It works very well for the Liberal Party. It has worked very well for the Liberal Party and Liberal governments for many years. There is an old saying in politics that when one has power, one does not want to relinquish it or give it up. I understand that the government House leader would get up here and say very proudly that the current system works very well. Yes, it does work well for a small group in a very elite setting, but for the vast majority of Canadians this system does not work.

Supply

I want to reflect on some of the comments that have been made by other members in the debate today because they have opened up a broader discussion. People have said that the level of voting is at an all time low in terms of participation in voting in elections. What I find in my community and across Canada is a horrible cynicism about the political process. People feel really turned off. I always feel very distraught by that because I think each of us as MPs do the best we can, but the system has become so poisoned that people feel so far removed from what is going on that it does not affect them in their daily lives.

On the other hand, however, we actually see an increase in the level of political activism. We can go to many community and see young people involved in struggles around environmental issues and who are fighting globalization and the transferring of power to corporations. We only have to look at what happened during the World Trade Organization meetings in Cancun, Mexico to see the amazing level of political activism in that arena. I find it very inspiring.

We can look at the hundreds of thousands of people who came together in Quebec City a few years ago during the free trade agreement of the Americas meetings. What is ironic is that many of those activists, the people engaged in political work, do not feel a connection to the electoral system.

• (1300)

The challenge we have here today, no matter what party we are from, is we have to find the connection for people. We have to show leadership in this place to recognize what is wrong and what needs to be fixed.

That is what the NDP motion is about today. It is not about sorting out the whole situation. It is not about finding all of the answers. It is about saying that we want to engage in an open process, a democratic discussion and debate with Canadians about changing our electoral system so that it is more democratic and reflects what people are actually doing in terms of how they vote. That has to come from us. We have to be pushed from the outside. As I said, there are organizations doing that, but it has to come from us.

From that point of view, I am very disheartened to hear government members just strike out the possibility that the motion will be approved today. The motion would allow that discussion in terms of a legitimate process to begin to take place. However, it is not the end of the day yet and there is always hope.

I do want to say that in my own community of east Vancouver there has been a lot of interest in this matter. I had a meeting a couple of years ago. The member for Regina—Qu'Appelle kindly came to the meeting. Several hundred people were packed into a room. There were representatives from the NDP, from the Green Party and from other political involvement. We had a very good debate. There was a very high level of interest from people in the community who wanted to press this issue forward in Parliament. I am so happy that the NDP has taken it up. I can say that we intend to make this an issue in the next election.

We know that the new leader of the Liberal Party, the guy who unfortunately we do not get to question in the House, the member for LaSalle—Émard, talks about democracy within his own party and

the way the Liberal leadership vote was done, but where does the member, the future leader of the Liberal Party, stand on the fundamental question of democracy for Canadians? We have heard not a peep out of the member on that very fundamental question.

We certainly intend to pursue this in the federal election and make it absolutely clear where the various political parties stand on this question.

Again, it is not about crossing all the *t*'s and dotting all the *i*'s, it is about agreeing upon a democratic principle. That is what we should be doing in the House today.

Just for a moment I want to talk about the issues that my colleague from Winnipeg North Centre raised in response to the government member. Her comments were right on in terms of this also being an issue about promoting equality for women. She said it very well.

The fact is when we look at those of us who are here in the House of Commons, we do not reflect our communities. We do not reflect women in Canada; there is 20% of us here. We do not reflect first nations communities. We do not reflect visible minorities or people with disabilities. The House is very much a reflection of the established order. Here again we have to look at the systemic discrimination, the issues that are built into the system that present barriers to groups of people and preclude people who actually would make incredible representatives if ever they were able to get here.

Again, the motion before us today that would call for a referendum, would set up a commission and would begin a public process is a way to have that sort of debate about women's equality, about representation from all of the diverse communities that we represent in our local communities and in our regions.

I am not naive to suggest that the question of proportional representation will solve all of the problems we have around democracy. There are lots of other issues as well. However if we send out a signal today that Parliament was committed to this kind of openness and debate about how we ourselves are elected, we would give a real shot of confidence to the people out there who would say "Yes, let us have that discussion". We would have a very exciting debate and there would be a very conclusion to it.

• (1305)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to see if I can get an answer to the question I asked the member for Winnipeg North Centre on the issue of gender parity.

I would appreciate if the member could explain in very basic terms how some method of proportional representation, and there are many, would achieve or facilitate gender parity. It did not exactly strike me that the argument being made answered the question. Maybe the member could help me with that.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I encourage the hon. member to become part of Fair Vote Canada and participate in those discussions and debates that are taking place.

As the member for Winnipeg North Centre clearly said in response to an earlier question, and maybe the member just does not get it, but a system of proportional representation would allow the system to be opened up. It is a very closed system. It is a system that gives preference to traditional ways of doing politics, of traditional elites in this country.

Allowing proportional representation that is geographical and regional, that is based on communities of interest allows for more people to have that representation come forward. That would be a very significant victory for women who, through a system of PR as we have seen demonstrated in other countries, would have the option to become involved in representation and would be able to take their rightful place in this chamber and speak for their communities.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reason there are more women and minorities in parliaments that have PR is that in a PR system every vote across the country counts equally. So parties are forced to have a team of candidates that reflects the country. If they do not, it invites a voter backlash because there is not a representative team.

In our first past the post system, there is not a party in the House that does not have a whole series of seats they cannot win. There tend to be minority candidates and women in a lot of seats that are unwinnable. Everybody gravitates toward the winnable seat so there is distortion in the system. In a PR system the team has to reflect the country, otherwise people will not vote for that team.

Would the member not think the same thing would likely happen here if we had a PR system? It would force all parties to have a more representative team of candidates and all these candidates would be winnable candidates because they had been elected through PR in some cases.

• (1310)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle for his question as well as his comment. He has really illuminated how a system of PR would promote the idea of equality.

If we had that system here in Canada, it would open up the process within political parties as well. Right now a very small number of Canadians belong to political parties. We have become very institutionalized in what we do. The NDP has taken very progressive steps to ensure that within our own party we abide by principles of affirmative action for women and for other equity-seeking groups. That has not been the case for other political parties.

To answer the member's question, in a system of PR wherein a party was forced to put the names on a ballot, and people of course still had the right to vote for their own local member, it would really open up that debate and provide a measure of accountability within political parties to be representative of Canadians at large. Who could disagree with that as a progressive step saying that it would actually produce a better democratic system?

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier I do believe that this is an important debate to have because it is part of the process of informing Canadians. I would like to compliment the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle who has been a longstanding advocate of considering some form of proportional representation for the consideration of Canadians. It is very helpful.

Supply

I also want to thank him for answering the question that I asked about how PR enhances the achievement of the goal of gender parity. Neither of his colleagues could answer the question. Neither of them did answer the question. Neither of them understood it; neither of them could answer the question. It really surprises me to get platitudes without having the succinctness that the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle had.

The member for Winnipeg North Centre knows that I was one of the strongest advocates supporting her objectives on Bill C-13 for women's health issues and for women's representation on the board. I continue to work for that even though the member has abandoned her support for that already because she has some ulterior motives. I guess it shows that if one asks a straight question, sometimes one does not get a straight answer.

With regard to the motion, there are two elements. The first part calls for a referendum within a year to determine if Canadians wish to replace the current electoral system with a system of proportional representation. The second part is if it is the will of Canadians to look at a method of proportional representation, that there be a commission to consult with Canadians on the model, the process and the implementation.

The motion is probably in reverse of what it should be. It is extremely difficult to ask Canadians in a referendum to respond to a question, hopefully a clear question, if they do not have all the information they would need to be able to make an informed judgment. That can only come with public education and consultation with Canadians, et cetera, which is what is being proposed after a referendum. On that basis alone, it surprises me that they were in that order. I am not sure why, but I think that it is somewhat problematic.

Notwithstanding that, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle has given a number of speeches over the years on this issue. The phrase that continues to stick is that every vote should count and no vote should be wasted. As a general premise, that is something with which Canadians would tend to agree. Every vote should count.

There are other problems. Some of those problems are with regard to people who do not respect their opportunity, their right and maybe their civic duty to exercise their franchise, to exercise that vote. That is another problem in itself. There is the issue of voter turnout. It has come up often in debate that my goodness, only 61% of people turned out to exercise their vote in the last election. The answer that has been given is it is because the system is bad. There is not a simple answer.

The House of Commons just received a report from the Chief Electoral Officer on the voter turnout by age. It addressed specifically the question of why youth have not been voting. The report showed that of youth 20 years of age and under who were eligible to vote, I believe it was only 18% of them actually voted. Eight-two per cent of the eligible voters 20 and 19 years of age did not vote in the last election. When it was plotted by age group, it was found that the per cent turnout went up very proportionately until it got to voters who were in excess of age 70, which had the highest turnout for an election.

Supply

•(1315)

It shows something, and I would like to think that it is reflective of another situation. Part of that situation is historically, and I know my colleagues are all going to be listening to this, the turnout pattern tends to be somewhat related to turning to our elders for wisdom. It is something attuned to that.

Another aspect I found very interesting in that report about the turnout situation was that in recent years Canada depended heavily on immigration policy to sustain the need for a growing population in Canada because the birthrate had gone down.

Many people who come to Canada come from countries where their political experiences have been negative. Their involvement in the political process has been discouraged. They have come from Communist countries, dictatorial countries, places where they have not had the nurturing of the civic duty, the civic pride and the openness to participate without having some sort of reaction. In fact some of the research has shown that many new Canadians are reluctant to participate in the electoral process and this is continuing to grow. I think very slowly we are seeing more and more new Canadians starting to get involved in the political process but it will take time.

It is not just cynicism about government. It is not just cynicism about politics. Part of the reason, I think most would admit in this place, is the fact that there is no government in waiting, and there has not been a government in waiting since 1993. No other party in this place, other than the government party, had enough people or enough representation to form a government in which the people of Canada would have confidence. If the people feel they have no choice of who their government will be, I would expect that that would have a negative impact on turnout. They would feel their vote would not matter because there was no alternative to the Liberal Party.

We do have some situations which will sustain this kind of a situation. We have the Alliance Party, which is predominantly a western party and which continually favours western issues over national issues. We have the Bloc Quebecois, which is exclusively dedicated to Quebec issues and the provincial sovereignty issue. That focuses an awful lot of attention away from the national issues.

I was looking back at a prior speech of the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle. One of the assertions he made was that proportional representation would force parties to have a more national vision. He may recall that. It would promote national vision. However, it has not.

In fact the experience of New Zealand, as one of our colleagues relayed to us, was that the system of proportional representation was bringing out more parties with more special interests, more regionalist views and less national views. There are many countries in which they have some sort of proportional representation, but I think we should look at it and maybe get the facts about whether it has created a system whereby many people have tried to move away from the nationalist vision and have tried to create a situation in which there are governments in waiting, people who can actually govern the country.

People could come to this place and argue as strenuously as they could for their narrow views on certain restricted issues. However when asked to participate in this place, to comment and to vote on issues of national importance, they would have no platform. They have no direction but they could be in a position to affect votes. We know that from a recent vote in the House when there was a tie. There is a problem.

I would not summarily dismiss proportional representation as being irrelevant for Canada and not applicable or not possible. However I would also say that I do not think that there is a system that will be perfect. I do not think there is a system that will satisfy all, that will ensure that 50% of the people in this place are women, and that all other interest groups, such as the member for Winnipeg North Centre said, aboriginal groups, are appropriately represented in this place.

•(1320)

Yes, we need to show a balanced team, a representation of the constituency and that is very important. However it is not something that can be legislated, mandated or forced because a democracy is about real choices.

If we said that we needed quotas for this group and that group, it would in fact be an anti-democratic philosophy. It does not recognize that any member in this place can speak credibly and effectively on behalf of minorities or special interests or whatever. We are Canadians first. If we do have this national vision, then obviously it is important that we have a sensitivity to all interests of Canadians at large, even though those interests may in fact be regionally based.

Any party that is not sensitive to the regionalization in our system today makes a fatal error. I think it is being experienced by the Canadian Alliance now and it is endemic in the Bloc Quebecois.

This place was operating much better without a pizza Parliament, without five parties. Three parties were better. The NDP played important roles in past governments, whether it was a minority or majority government. There was this focus on being a national party with a national vision and trying to balance the interests of Canadians, which sometimes come into conflict.

There are many aspects to this. It is an important question to look at. It is not as simple to totally dismiss our current British parliamentary system of electing candidates in 301 ridings and have those people in the riding. We know Canadians do not all vote for the same reason. Some people will vote for the party. I think that dyed-in-the-wool, "I am this party and I have been that way all my life", has been diminishing substantially. I think the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle would agree that dyed-in-the-wool any party is an archaic term which probably is not terribly applicable today.

On leadership, who is the leader, who shall be the spokesperson for Canadians on the national stage and on the international stage? For some people, “who is my spokesman” is very important and they will give weighting to that. For some people, it is the platform. It has to be a national platform. It has to be a national vision. It has to address regional imbalances. It has to represent what we will do for those who are unable to help themselves and care for themselves. What will we do to have intergenerational equity? What will we do to deal with the gap between the rich and the poor? What will we do to ensure child poverty is a thing of the past? What will we do about so many of our social issues?

These are the things that Canadians want to hear. I do not think it is a valid argument to suggest that by changing the method of voting or election will somehow solve some of these problems. It may change the mix in this place. We have to think about it, and I think the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle had made an argument and an example that we could possibly have a mixed proportional representation system.

It would be a system whereby there would be perhaps 200 ridings in Canada instead of the current 301, as an example. Every party would run a candidate in each of those 200. The balance of the seats, approximately 100, would then be filled based on the party preference of the people who had voted on the riding basis, by lists of people who were submitted by each of the parties, however those lists were created, whether the party elected them in its own internal processes or they were simply appointed by the party. I do not know exactly. There would be these people who did not run in the election, did not have their name on a ballot but would be eligible to become members of Parliament because they were on someone's list.

I started to think about that and it struck me that if we have 301 seats now and I have 110,000 constituents, then all of a sudden, under the proportional representation system which the member suggests might be appropriate for Canada, I now have 50% more constituents. Instead of having 110, I am up at 165. I now have 50% more constituents with whom I must deal.

● (1325)

Then there is this other group, about one-third of the House of Commons, who would be people who were not elected specifically but were basically the designates or appointees of a particular party so we could achieve a seat level that was distributed in proportion to the votes the various parties received.

Look at this place then. All of a sudden, we have two classes of members of Parliament. We would have those who now have a riding that is 50% larger, 50% more workload for the member of Parliament. That means one-third to one-half less time to address the specific or individual needs of constituents simply because of the 50% increase. It would mean our job, our ability to deal with our constituents would be impaired to the extent that we can service people now.

On the other hand we would have another group, one-third of this place, of people who simply would be appointed. They could be the elite, the backbench hacks. They could be on the list for a particular party for a variety of reasons. There are many reasons why somebody might be on the list.

Supply

Is this democracy? No, it is not. We would have people in this place who would be elitist. Because they were on the list, they would automatically be in the House of Commons. They would not have to take care of constituents. What would they do? They would do other things. They would ensure that they were organized in a way which would polarize. It might put us in a situation where this place would not only physically two classes but in terms of thinking and collaboration, we would have a polarization of those who were elected by people and those who were appointed by parties.

This is proportional representation. It is not exactly a pure model of democracy. It is quasi-democracy but it does achieve the objective that the member is proposing, which is every vote would count. It would not count for every elector because it helped to get their person elected. Where it would help though, is the party for which the person they voted for belonged would at least get a proportional number of the seats. The member presumes and the system presumes that Canadians voting for candidates of a particular party prefer that party as opposed to them voting for candidates because they are a darned good and they are the people they want to represent them.

There is this slippage or leakage in terms of the logic. It is not perfect and our current system is not perfect. However I would suggest that it is probably better than the alternative. I used the example of Italy, and I was not aware that it was a bad example, that it has had 48 elections out of the last 50 years under proportional representation. Maybe that is an extreme case.

Let us look at another case. How about the Nazis in Germany. They came to power under a proportional representation. They could not have under any other system. It really does come to that.

I see my time is almost up now. I would simply like to close with a further statement with regard to the issue of gender parity. I am not sure that proportional representation is the only solution, but I want to again be on the record that I believe that this place would be a better place with a more equitable balance of men and women in this chamber.

● (1330)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, at the outset of my comments I guess I have to use the word unbelievable to sum up the comments of my colleague across the way in this regard. He had the audacity to suggest that he was opposed to proportional representation because in his words it would produce a quasi-democracy.

The very government that we have in place today has been described, I would say erroneously, as a benevolent dictatorship. Some days I question the benevolent part, but definitely it is a dictatorship under our existing system with the archaic party discipline that is exercised under our system.

Does this system need to be reformed? Absolutely. Canadians from coast to coast recognize that it needs to be changed.

Supply

We can argue and debate the merits of proportional representation, preferential balloting, first past the post and any other system we want to bring forward. However we will never change our system—and I would suggest for the better—and reform our system for the better to allow free votes in this place, what a concept. We would allow for an elected upper chamber, what a concept. We will not allow for a different way of electing our members of Parliament unless there is that debate not just in this place for one day, but out in the real world among the real people who should be deciding this issue.

Therefore I ask my colleague from the Liberal Party, when he casts his vote tonight on this motion, to carefully consider the merits of having that debate in Canada culminating with a referendum.

The Canadian Alliance has long advocated the use of referendums coinciding with national elections. We all know that the turnout in national elections has been declining over the last several elections. We should have a referendum to decide this type of issue, by the people for the people.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the debate has been going on for years. I do not know where the member has been.

The member said that we should consult Canadians and have a referendum. However, if the member were to read the motion, it states to have a referendum and then for a commission to consult Canadians. It is in reverse. For that reason I will vote against the motion.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions. If someone were to move an amendment to strike out the reference to the first referendum, would the member then support the motion? The important thing is to have a parliamentary committee or commission to study the idea of proportional representation and then put that proposition to Canadians where they can choose between the new system and the status quo. That is all we are asking for and that is what we should be doing. That is what happened in New Zealand.

I also want the member to answer a second question. If one were to look around the world at the OECD, it is only the Americans and ourselves who have the first past the post system. Even the British are moving away from first past the post as evidenced by what happened in terms of the election of the Welsh parliament and the Scottish parliament.

All the MPs in the European Community were elected by proportional representation. After the fall of the Soviet Union all the emerging democracies have a form of proportional representation.

Why have any of these new democracies and new emerging countries not adopted our voting system? Why have none of them adopted the first past the post system? If it is so good, why does everyone turn away from it?

• (1335)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the member raises a couple of good points. I am sorry that his party did not word the motion correctly in the first place. It probably would have facilitated the process a little better.

First, referendums are just like an election. It costs in the neighbourhood of about \$30 million to conduct a referendum, plus the cost of educating Canadians about the question. Canadians just cannot be sent to the ballot box, et cetera. There has to be public exposure of the issue. It is a very expensive process. I am sure that many members would vote against this resolution simply on the basis that we should not be holding referendums when we cannot make decisions ourselves.

Second, with regard to the fact that other countries have not adopted the British parliamentary system, I have never suggested that we would never change our system. But, quite frankly, the premise of the member's question is that a country is a country and we are all the same. We are not all the same.

In fact, we are so different and our system is so lousy that for about seven years running Canada was identified as the best country in the world in which to work and live. That is not reflective of a country that is falling apart in its political governance system.

Our standing, in terms of the UN index, continues to be very high. We are still in the top three or five.

I do not think we should aspire to abandon a governance model, a political framework, which in fact has led to Canada becoming one of the strongest, most cherished democracies in the world.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the constituents of Surrey Central to participate supply day motion put forward by the NDP.

The motion under consideration today calls upon the government to hold a referendum within one year to determine whether Canadians wish to replace the current electoral system with a system of proportional representation, and if so, to appoint a commission to consult Canadians on the preferred model of proportional representation, with an implementation date no later than July 1, 2006.

The motion deals with two things: the electoral reform process and whether to replace the current system.

I agree that there is something fundamentally wrong with our current electoral system. As a result of our current first past the post system of electing representatives, both in provincial and federal elections, millions of votes do not count.

Let us look at the 1997 election results. With only 38% of the popular vote, the smallest mandate in Canadian history for a majority government, the Liberals clung to government and the power to rule. In the last election in 2000, with a minority of popular vote, that is 40.8%, the Liberals won 172 out of 301 seats in the House of Commons. With just 40.8% of the votes, they won 57% of the seats.

During the last election, the Canadian Alliance received more than one million votes in Ontario. That is 24% of the total votes. One out of four people in Ontario voted for the Canadian Alliance. What did we get? We got 2 seats out of 103 total seats in Ontario. Something is fundamentally wrong.

Meanwhile, the Liberals got 2.3 million votes, about twice as many as Canadian Alliance votes in Ontario but 50 times as many seats as the Canadian Alliance. Based upon the total vote, there should be about 25% Alliance MPs from Ontario.

In a fair voting system, no one could credibly say that the Alliance is merely a western party. In our system, some votes count more than others. The Liberals received 5.2 million votes to win 172 seats in Parliament. That is an average of 30,000 votes per MP for the Liberals. The Alliance on the other hand needed an average of 49,000 votes to get one MP elected.

The cost of seats was even higher for the NDP and the Conservatives, the smaller parties in the House. They needed on average about 84,000 votes for an NDP MP and 130,000 votes for a Conservative MP to win their 13 and 12 seats in the House respectively.

If seats from the 2000 election were allocated based upon a pure proportional model that we are debating today, the Commons seat tally today would be: Liberals, 123 seats instead of 172; Alliance, 77 seats instead of 66, we would gain 11 and they would lose many; Conservatives, 37 seats instead of 12; Bloc, 32 instead of the 38 they have now; and the NDP, 26 instead of 13. Other smaller parties would have won some seats in the House. The composition of this House would certainly change if we had a modern proportional representative system in place.

• (1340)

Since World War I or, let us say, out of the 16 majority governments in Canada, only four of them were legitimate majority governments. The remaining received a minority of votes but a majority of members in the House. As a result, they have held unchallenged and unaccountable power even though the majority of Canadians voted against them. The last election again represented a dramatic distortion of what voters said at the ballot box and created yet another phony majority government for Canadians.

In the single member plurality system, also called the SMP system, parliamentary seats go to the party that receives the most votes in a riding. Votes cast for losing candidates become completely irrelevant, no matter that they expressed the democratic wishes of, very likely, the majority of voters in that riding. They will not be represented. In effect, some people win the right to have their voices represented and everybody else loses.

It is the same story in the provinces. In British Columbia, the previous NDP government had a majority even though it received fewer votes than the opposition Liberals. Similarly, Mr. Lucien Bouchard became Premier of Quebec in 1998 with an overwhelming majority of seats although the Parti Québécois got fewer votes than Jean Charest's Liberals.

Internationally, 33 of the world's 36 major democracies use forms of proportional representation for national elections. Only Canada, the United States and India do not use such systems. Proportional elections have taken place in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In fact, Canada, the United States and India right now are the only holdouts in the move to have some form of proportional representation.

Supply

Suddenly, proportional representation has become all the rage. B.C. is in the process of appointing a citizens committee to examine ways to better translate votes into seats in the legislature. Similarly, the new Quebec provincial government has announced plans to introduce proportional representation legislation next year. The front-runner in the current Ontario provincial election is promising a referendum on proportional representation. We also know that the idea is being considered by the newly re-elected Premiers of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. It is the federal government that does not have the will to reform the current electoral system because that will not favour it anymore.

The worst aspect of our electoral system is that it exacerbates regional differences. If we look at an electoral map, we will see that everybody in the west seems to be Alliance supporters, which I am proud of. Everybody in Ontario is perceived to be Liberal. Everybody in Quebec is perceived to support the Bloc, but that of course is not true.

As I said earlier, Canada is one of few modern industrial democracies, so-called democracies, that still uses this outdated system. This system was invented even before the telephone was invented. We can imagine how much we are lagging behind. Even Great Britain has started to abandon the old system, which we have been following.

Under proportional representation, the distribution of seats and power is a function of the popular vote cast for respective candidates and/or their political parties. Different versions of proportional representation systems are employed in more than 90 jurisdictions and can be tailored to reflect the needs of different countries. There should be no hesitation in having an electoral system that will work for Canadians and will work for Canada.

• (1345)

The most common suggestion is that proportional representation would be a mix of the existing and new systems where members of Parliament elected in ridings across the country would be joined by a number of "at large" MPs, or "top-up seats", chosen on the basis of the number of votes parties received and nominated by their parties.

A party that wins far less than its fair proportion of seats through the first past the post system would be entitled to extra compensatory seats. This is the type of system being considered for British Columbia and Quebec, which I mentioned earlier and which looks to a smaller model that has worked well in the Greater London Assembly in Britain, where 11 of the 25 members are elected at large.

We call Great Britain's parliamentary system the mother of parliaments. If Great Britain has adopted that system, what is the problem with adopting a similar system in Canada?

The principle of allocating proportional representative seats on a compensatory basis is also already in use in New Zealand, Germany and many other countries. It allows parties to flourish that have a national appeal but suffer from being too regionally dispersed.

Supply

Proportional systems are employed around the world. With the possible exceptions of Israel and Italy, they produce governments that are no less stable than our own. We have had elections after three and a half years for the last three elections. We know that the government is using political opportunity to call elections rather than have a fixed election date. There is the argument that proportional representation does not produce a stable government as good as the system we currently have; parties have to combine forces in order to rule, some people say, but it yields governments that are both more representative and more accountable. Moreover, there would be more representation from women and minorities depending on the percentage and population.

In proportional representation, there is no such thing as a wasted vote since even small parties can make their presence felt. Strategic voting is of much less interest. There is more opportunity to vote for a political party rather than against a political party.

Perhaps the greatest proof of the success of proportional representation is in voter turnout. Voter turnout is very important. It is a significant problem, a major problem, of our electoral system. Canada has seen a disturbing decline in voter turnout over at least the past four elections.

Canada's voter turnout in federal elections is among the lowest in all western democracies. In 1984 and 1988, about 75% of eligible voters cast ballots. In 1993, the number dropped to 69.6% and, in 1997, it fell again to 67%. In the 2000 election, it fell further to 61%. It is very discouraging.

Even the 61% figure is an inflated figure. I will explain how. In Canada we count those who vote as a share of people on the voting list. The list misses a fair number of Canadians, perhaps about 10% to 15% of eligible voters. If we counted those who vote as a share of all those eligible to vote, turnout would be around 53%. It is shameful that in a democracy the turnout is something like 50% to 60%. The biggest drop has been among the youngest voters.

While more than 3 million Canadian voters, mostly young, clogged the telephone lines to vote for our new Canadian idol, few seem to place the same importance on selecting our prime minister. Only 25% of people between the ages of 18 to 24 voted in the last federal election.

The chief electoral officer, Mr. Jean-Pierre Kingsley, is so concerned about low voter turnout among young Canadians that his office has commissioned a number of studies and has begun holding forums to examine the problem. If political scientists are right, a new electoral system such as proportional representation may not entice completely uninterested young people into voting. However, it will certainly help, judging from international experience, where countries using variations on proportional representation have slightly higher voter turnouts than those using Canadian style, first past the post systems.

• (1350)

Opponents of proportional representation argue that it encourages the creation of small parties and makes it very hard to elect a majority government. They say that politicians end up deciding after the voting is over which parties should combine to form a coalition government.

After 20 years of arrogant majority rule by Liberal and PC governments, we think a little uncertainty in those holding the reins would be a good thing. Canada desperately needs a new voting system. In proportional systems, coalition governments are more common. Successful coalitions respect the diversity of opinion articulated by voters on election day. Once the Liberals, the governing party in this case, win by the first past the post system, they are loath to change it.

The Canadian Alliance and the NDP are two different parties from opposite ends of the political spectrum. They disagree on most issues but they agree on one thing: that changing our electoral system to better represent the wishes of voters is an urgent necessity.

With this motion, the NDP has almost taken a page out of the Canadian Alliance policy manual. Canadian Alliance policy number 85 states that "to improve the representative nature of our electoral system, we will consider electoral reforms, including proportional representation, the single transferable ballot, electronic voting and fixed election dates", where each Parliament is elected four years from the previous federal election, except when it is defeated by a confidence motion. We will submit such options to voters in a nationwide referendum.

To conclude, the principle of proportional voting is simple: that like-minded voters should be able to win seats in proportion to their share of votes they get. Its mechanisms range from party based systems, which allow small parties to win seats, to candidate based systems such as cumulative voting, which would simply widen the big tent of the major parties.

Either way, proportional voting would help to reinvigorate Canadian politics, encouraging more policy making and giving voters a greater range of choice and of course more accountability and transparency in the way we govern ourselves.

Therefore, I would like to state that I support electoral reform. As to whether it should be proportional representation or some other form of reform such as the single transferable ballot, we need to debate that.

Of course we know that the electoral system is not fair now, as we see in the redistribution of ridings across Canada. I made a presentation before the procedure and House affairs committee. In its report it had the strongest recommendation for the proposal I made to the committee and it sent that recommendation to the B.C. elections commission. But that commission ignored the recommendation, the strongest recommendation from the procedure and House affairs committee. Therefore, we know that the system is not working perfectly.

There are 190,000 people living in my riding whereas the average riding in Canada has 95,000 electors. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you will not allow me to, but I should have two votes in the House based on the number of people I represent. If we compare it to Prince Edward Island, maybe I should have five votes in the House.

I know the system is not working. The voice of my constituents is not represented as much as the voice of the constituents of a member of Parliament who is representing 40,000 people. Therefore, I am the right person to state here in the House that we need electoral reform to completely reform the system that exists. Therefore, this evening I will be voting in support of this motion.

• (1355)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): There is not enough time to indulge in questions or comments. I will suggest that after question period the hon. member for Surrey Central will be entitled to his 10 minutes of questions or comments.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, an April 2003 report by the justice department's own evaluators found major weaknesses in the ability of the billion dollar gun registry to provide crucial information to firearms officers and police.

Last week when I raised this matter in the House, the Solicitor General said that his February action plan addressed all 90 problems identified by the April evaluation of the firearms program, but in today's newspapers the Solicitor General is being contradicted by an official in his own department.

Last week, one of my 380 access to information requests revealed that the RCMP failed to check CPIC before they registered thousands of stolen guns.

Why does the new minister of this mess continue the culture of secrecy? Where is the openness and transparency we were promised last December? When will the minister finally tell this House how much it will cost to fully implement the gun registry and how much it will cost to maintain?

* * *

[Translation]

WILFRID LEMOINE

Mr. Gilbert Barrette (Témiscamingue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that we learned this weekend of the death of Wilfrid Lemoine, one of Quebec's finest reporters. Mr. Lemoine passed away Saturday night, at the hospital centre in Granby. He was 76.

A culture buff, Wilfrid Lemoine had taken on the mission, so to speak, of bringing the big names of his generation into the homes of millions of Canadians. He interviewed such illustrious people as Salvador Dalí, Simone Signoret, Georges Simenon and Juliette Gréco.

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He is considered by many as the inventor of the television interview in Canada. His secret was to keep in the background, giving the interviewee the prominent place he or she deserved. In fact, his style remains as influential as always.

I take this opportunity to extend my most sincere condolences to Mr. Lemoine's family and loved ones.

* * *

• (1400)

POLICE AND PEACE OFFICERS

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past year, six Canadian police and peace officers were killed in the line of duty.

They are Senior Constable Alan G. Kuzmich, of the South Simcoe Police; RCMP Constable Jimmy Ng, of Richmond, B.C.; Corporal Antonio Arseneault, of the Sûreté du Québec in Laval; Walter Ceolin, a conservation officer from Ontario; Senior Constable Phil Shrive, of the Ontario Provincial Police in Renfrew; and RCMP Constable Ghislain Maurice, from Alberta.

Yesterday, it was with compassion that thousands of police officers, civilians and parliamentarians honoured them on Parliament Hill. To attest to their courage and dedication, their names will be added to the Memorial Honour Roll.

On behalf of myself and all the citizens of the riding of Laval West, I acknowledge their sacrifice and extend my deepest sympathy to their families.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, time has run out for Canada. The 100 days are up. Canada must move our defence policy beyond a series of talking points to one of serious commitment to the collective security of the western hemisphere.

The indecision by Canada on whether or not to participate in the North American missile defence program has jeopardized 13,000 to 20,000 jobs in Ontario and Quebec. The benefit of restoring the Canada-U.S. relationship goes beyond the safety and security of the continent.

Between the U.S. ban on our export of live cattle to penalties on U.S. imports of our softwood lumber, it is time to repair the relationship with our largest trading partner.

The U.S. house of representatives and senate are currently in conference over defence spending bill 1588 for the fiscal year beginning October 1, which if passed as is will mean the loss of thousands of Canadian jobs.

In the interest of Canadian sovereignty and security, jobs investment, it is time the government made a clear decision regarding missile defence.

S. O. 31

ETHNIC DIVERSITY SURVEY

Mr. John Maloney (Erie—Lincoln, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Statistics Canada officially released the results of the ethnic diversity survey which was conducted by Statistics Canada in 2002.

The survey represents an important milestone in the study of ethnicity in Canada. The survey provides policy makers and researchers with unique information on ethnocultural minorities and will allow researchers and policy makers to better understand these communities and therefore Canada. The survey provides us with groundbreaking research about people living in Canada, especially ethnocultural minorities, with respect to their cultural heritage, their family background, their knowledge and use of languages, their participation in Canadian society and their economic activities.

It also provides information about perceived discrimination and unfair treatment based on ethnocultural and ethn racial background.

Initiatives such as the ethnic diversity survey will give us a better understanding of the role diversity plays in Canadian society and how it affects the lives of Canadians. It will also assist decision makers in developing policies and programs that better meet the needs of all Canadians.

* * *

WINTER SPORTS

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, inspired by a love of winter sports, an appetite for international competition, a pride in community and a commitment to the state of Israel, many Winnipeggers gathered at a hall in Winnipeg on Thursday, September 25, in support of the Israeli bobsled team; certainly not the first thing one thinks of when one thinks of Israel.

For the first time in history Israel has such a team, sanctioned by the Israeli Olympic committee and the Federation of International Bobsled and Tobogganing.

It is a team composed of two Americans, John Frank and Aaron Zeff, and one Canadian, David Greaves of Winnipeg. All three have dual Israeli citizenship. They are coached by the former captain of the New Zealand bobsled team, Ross Dominikovich. It is truly a global partnership.

The team is now focusing on next season's world cup, with the ultimate goal to be selected to represent Israel and compete among the elite teams of the world at the 2006 Olympics.

The team will showcase new options for the youth of Israel. It hopes, in the manner of the Olympic tradition, "to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport".

This is indeed a story of hope and inspiration for a beleaguered country. We offer our best wishes to these ambitious and purposeful pioneers.

ROYAL CANADIAN ARMY CADETS

Mr. Janko Péric (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year the Royal Canadian Army Cadets are celebrating their 125th anniversary.

The cadet program is the largest federally sponsored youth program in Canada. Some 55,000 young men and women are members in 1,100 corps and squadrons across Canada, including three in my riding of Cambridge.

Cadets participate in a number of activities, including ceremonial drills, marksmanship, map and compass reading, first aid, sports and citizenship events.

The program fosters leadership, responsibility, discipline, good citizenship, physical fitness, communication skills and an interest in the Canadian Forces.

I encourage all members to actively support the cadet movement as it evolves and adapts to meet the needs of our youth and prepares them to become the leaders of tomorrow.

* * *

• (1405)

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, October 1, we will celebrate the International Day of Older Persons.

Older people play an important role in our lives and their contributions enrich our communities. They are present in all our local volunteer organizations and are always ready to reach out a helping hand. They are the foundations of our families and the embodiment of wisdom and, as such, deserve society's gratitude.

It is essential that the government ensure that all rights of the men and women who have built our society are respected.

I invite all Quebeckers and all Canadians to take this occasion to celebrate the important contribution of older persons to our society and to encourage relationships based on respect and mutual assistance between the generations.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN WOMEN'S SOCCER TEAM

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday the Canadian women's world cup soccer team scored a crucial victory over the team from Japan to become the first Canadian team, men's or women's, to make it out of the first round of a world cup. The Canadian team played a fast paced, hard-hitting game to win three to one over Japan.

The women's world cup team has now won nine out of its last ten games. Now that they have advanced to the quarter finals of the world cup, the Canadian women's team will play China on Thursday.

Veteran player, Charmaine Hooper, thinks the team can go all the way. As she said after the game on Saturday, "If we have such a great goal in our minds, I feel we can go far".

I am sure the House will join in wishing the players and coach, Even Pellerud, the best of luck for their second round game on Thursday.

* * *

VETERANS' WIDOWS

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to believe that a country as wealthy as Canada could turn a deaf ear to some 23,000 war veterans' widows who are crying out to the government to restore their independence program. This small monthly amount would bring a tremendous measure of financial relief to these destitute and often lonely people.

My offices have received hundreds of tragic stories that depict the hardship as well as the injustice caused by the loss of the veterans independence program. This is a national plea from our war widows from coast to coast.

This House has been told that there is no money for these aging veterans' widows but Canadians will not accept that because they know there is lots of money, and it shows up in incompetence and even fraud, that would more than meet the daily needs of these widows to whom we owe so much.

* * *

[Translation]

HURRICANE JUAN

Mr. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, now that Hurricane Juan has passed through Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, it is time to assess the damage and clean up.

Hurricane Juan reached the eastern shore of Nova Scotia Sunday night, bringing with it heavy rain and winds up to 139 km per hour.

Worse yet, Juan took two lives. First, a paramedic who was responding to an emergency call died when a tree fell on his vehicle near the Halifax hospital. Later, at Enfield, another person died. These are very sad events.

I invite the House to join with me in thinking of the victims and their families and everyone who has suffered in the storm.

* * *

[English]

PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great day to be a Tory.

I want to congratulate Premier Pat Binns and the PC Party of Prince Edward Island on the election of their third majority government. Obviously the PC Party is alive and well in Atlantic Canada.

I also want to wish Danny Williams and the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador success in the general election called for October 21. The PCs have held a solid lead in public opinion polls since Danny Williams became party leader a couple of years ago. I have every confidence we will soon see another PC government take the helm in Newfoundland and Labrador.

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Obviously, reports of the PC Party's demise have been greatly exaggerated.

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[Translation]

DAY CARE PROGRAM

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in recent years the Government of Quebec has had a \$5 a day day care program, which makes Quebec the envy of all of the Canadian provinces.

The federal government did not contribute to it, but has managed to deprive the taxpayers in Quebec of pretty close to \$1 billion since the program was inaugurated in 1998.

Since families pay only \$5 daily per child, rather than \$25 or \$30, their child care tax deductions are reduced accordingly.

Who is mainly responsible for this injustice? The former finance minister, the very same one who masterminded the 1993 Liberal platform and proposed major investments in daycare. A promise that was not kept.

The masks are beginning to fall away, and we can now see that, despite his efforts to show he is different, the future Liberal leader is no more than a carbon copy of the present Prime Minister.

* * *

●(1410)

[English]

HURRICANE JUAN

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, such destruction has not been seen in my community since the Halifax explosion of 1917.

After hurricane Juan subsided, thousands of trees lay across roads and on people's roofs. Trains lay in water and boats sank or were blown on to public sidewalks. Our much loved public gardens in the heart of our city were ravaged.

Thousands of people and businesses have suffered massive losses but one thing is clear, like the past tragedies that have struck our region, communities have come together to tackle the challenge of rebuilding. Neighbours, military personnel, emergency crews, paramedic staff and municipal workers are working together to make as quick and as smooth a recovery as possible.

My colleagues for Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore and Dartmouth extend our sympathies to the families of those lost to the hurricane and pledge to continue working with all concerned parties in a spirit of co-operation and community to ensure that all Nova Scotians can return to their daily lives.

*Oral Questions***RICHMOND HILL**

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Oak Ridges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce that the town of Richmond Hill in my riding of Oak Ridges was awarded a five-bloom rating out of five for its 2003 communities in bloom program with a special mention for floral display. This places Richmond Hill in first place at the national level among cities of its size.

The results were announced this past Saturday at the national awards ceremony hosted by the city of Stratford, which honoured competing municipalities from each province and territory across the country.

The Richmond Hill communities in bloom committee was commended by the judges for creating an organization that consolidates so many diverse groups in the town and believes that it is now an important operation in the vitality of the area.

Richmond Hill also received high standing in the 2001 competition, with a special mention for its efforts in the area of historic restoration.

These awards speak for themselves and I invite all to see Richmond Hill, a community that combines volunteerism, dedication and a sense of pride in all that it does.

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[*Translation*]**SÉMINAIRE DE NICOLET**

Mr. Jean-Guy Carignan (Québec East, Lib. Ind.): Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday, September 27, I had the great pleasure of taking part in the bicentenary celebrations of the Séminaire de Nicolet, my alma mater.

Seven hundred alumni attended the event to share memories, socialize and celebrate the 200 years that this, one of the oldest and noblest educational institutions in Quebec and Canada, has been making its influence felt.

Over those 200 years, generous and devoted educators have shared their knowledge and counsel with generations of young people who have developed into the elite of our society.

Over those 200 years, the Séminaire has held a vital place within society, acting as a beacon and a guide for its advancement.

Over those 200 years, it has promoted religion and art in all of its forms, as indicated by its motto, "*Religioni et bonis artibus*". Equally, it has promoted and defended the French language and culture in Quebec and Canada.

All of this has been accomplished within an atmosphere of faith, devotion and love.

And it can all be very aptly summed up by the motto of my graduating year, 1963: "*Omnia vincit amor*": Love conquers all.

[*English*]**HURRICANE JUAN**

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, hurricane Juan smashed into the coast of Nova Scotia on Sunday evening, leaving behind a wake of damage and destruction.

Trees that survived the Halifax explosion were uprooted, leaving behind a jungle of debris. Record winds downed power lines and lifted roofs.

Unfortunately two lives were lost as a result of this vicious storm: a paramedic working in the line of duty and a gentleman from Enfield. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families and friends.

Communities and their emergency teams have responded quickly to begin the challenge of the massive clean-up. They have the assistance of 600 armed forces personnel. Residents are pulling together in their neighbourhoods to clear away hazards and cope with power outages.

Juan was the storm of a lifetime for many Nova Scotians but, in true Nova Scotian style, his aftermath can and will be overcome.

* * *

● (1415)

NATURAL GAS

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the North American supply and demand of natural gas should be a real concern to consumers because of the potential for price spikes over the winter months. There is enough supply in the ground for the long term but what we need from the government is a commitment to a transparent and consistent approach to regulatory policies and principles, one that encourages investment and allows the industry to bring known reserves to market to meet the growing demand and provide price stability and avoid a short term supply crisis.

The construction of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline is crucial for the supply of natural gas in this country. I encourage the government to do whatever it takes to move this project forward.

The Canadian Gas Association is recommending a national round table for the natural gas industry which would help maximize the potential of this strategic resource. I would encourage the government to assist the industry with the creation of this round table and participate where appropriate.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD[*English*]**FORMER PRIVACY COMMISSIONER**

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, today the Auditor General released her report on the former Privacy Commissioner.

Oral Questions

The most disturbing finding about Mr. Radwanski is his treatment of employees. Employees apparently worked in an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. There was a reign of terror. They were afraid to come forward and there was little or no protection for staff for trying to correct wrongdoing.

My question for the Prime Minister is simple. Does this not illustrate better than we ever could on this side why the Canadian Alliance and many others are demanding whistle-blower protection legislation and is it not about time this was introduced in the federal public service?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are following a step-by-step approach to protect whistleblowers who signal wrongdoing in the public service.

Two years ago, a policy was issued, and a Public Service Integrity Officer was appointed and asked to table a report to Parliament, which he did 15 days ago.

We welcome the recommendations in this report, and a working group will issue its final recommendations in January 2004 on this matter. Parliamentarians will have the opportunity to provide government with their own recommendations.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, while the government takes year after year to study this, employees are being abused. This should end right now and the government should be bringing in whistle-blower protection.

The Privacy Commissioner is just one example of an office that is appointed without the scrutiny of Parliament.

While in office, Mr. Radwanski apparently exhibited a blatant disregard for the rules and the law, a blatant disregard for employees, for taxpayers and for the reputation of Parliament itself.

In the future, will the government at least listen to the Auditor General and commit to a full parliamentary review for all appointees?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the case of appointees of the House of Commons like that, we seek the approval of the opposition parties. In this case, like the others, we wrote to all the leaders. There was some comment and we had input from members of Parliament who approved that recommendation. He was questioned by the senators at length. There was a vote and it was approved 49 to 7. He is an officer of the House of Commons and the committee of the House of Commons has done its job on this file.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we should not just be asked for a few comments in the elected House. There should be a full parliamentary review of the actual appointees.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, today, the Auditor General's report noted, "a major breakdown of controls over financial management and the abuse of the public treasury. Appointments are not subject to review, there are few controls on spending and no one is accountable to the taxpayers or Parliament".

What disciplinary measures is the government planning to take to prevent similar abuses in the future?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the House of Commons has adopted a new provision, Standing Order 111(1), which currently requires appointees or candidates for an appointment such as that to appear.

This is not a government position, but rather a position answerable to the House of Commons, and the candidate is selected with the approval of the House of Commons. A parliamentary committee can review the work done by the appointee, which is exactly what happened in this instance. The committee tabled its report and the Auditor General tabled her report yesterday, pursuant to the Standing Orders. The entire House has a role to perform, and it performed it satisfactorily in this instance.

● (1420)

[*English*]

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the report of the Auditor General today reaffirmed that a culture of corruption and entitlement pervades the highest levels of government. The report points out that the Treasury Board failed Canadians by not taking action when signs were obvious that there were huge problems within the Privacy Commissioner's office.

Let me ask the President of the Treasury Board, will she act now to ensure that the Treasury Board rules are followed, or is she going to let this happen again?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think that the member for St. Albert should stop saying there is corruption in all government and follow the advice of the Auditor General. Let me quote what she has said:

While the behaviour of the former Privacy Commissioner and some executives was clearly unacceptable in this case, it is by no means the norm. Using this case to tarnish the reputation of the staff of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner and the entire federal public service would be unfair—

That is what he is doing.

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): I pointed out yesterday, Mr. Speaker, how widespread the problem is. Yesterday the Public Service Commission reported in its audit of George Radwanski's office that it was the worst case of mismanagement that it had ever seen, but it knew two years ago about the problems and did absolutely nothing. Talk about ethical malaise.

My question for the minister responsible for the Public Service Commission is, whose head is going to roll over there because staff intimidation and a reign of terror should have been stopped by the Public Service Commission long ago?

Oral Questions

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, why does the member for St. Albert not know that the Public Service Commission does not report to me? The Public Service Commission reports to parliamentarians. I think that parliamentarians through the government operations committee play a very important role here. We should thank all the members of that committee who have raised issues. This is an issue for all parliamentarians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to cover the President of the Treasury Board, who knew that the lavish spending of the former Privacy Commissioner was not in accordance with the rules of her own department, the Prime Minister stated today that all opposition parties approved the appointment of George Radwanski.

How could the Prime Minister make such a statement when he knows full well that all the members of the Bloc Québécois voted against the appointment of George Radwanski?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that I have here a quote from a member of the Bloc Québécois, saying that this man is a reputable figure, that he is brilliant, very intelligent and so on, and that the problem was not with the person, but with the approach. I think the member ought to check with his colleague.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said that he had consulted all party leaders. The decision was made following a vote in this place. All the members of the Bloc Québécois voted against that appointment. I voted, and did not approve the appointment of George Radwanski.

How can the Prime Minister tell me today that we approved it, when this vote was actually recorded? If he looks at the results of the vote, he will see that all the members of the Bloc Québécois voted against George Radwanski.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I made a mistake, I apologize, but I have before me a statement by the hon. member for Laval Centre praising Mr. Radwanski. Of course, it was somewhat confusing to me that a member would praise him when her leader was not in favour of his appointment. This is not the first time that the leader has not backed one of his members.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is also not the first time the Prime Minister has not told the truth about what happened.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Roberval knows that all the members always tell the truth in the House. He knows that and does not want to suggest otherwise.

•(1425)

Mr. Michel Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, the Radwanski affair is taking on a very political dimension. According to the Auditor General, the President of the Treasury Board was perfectly aware that the former Privacy Commissioner's lavish spending was done in violation of the mechanisms put in place by her own department.

How does the President of the Treasury Board explain that George Radwanski flouted spending control rules that she is in charge of enforcing, and that she said nothing?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in order to enlighten the House of Commons, I would like to quote what the member for Laval Centre said:

As for the appointment of Mr. Radwanski, anyone taking the time to read his resumé can only agree that this man has a very extensive knowledge of Canadian politics. He is most certainly a brilliant and very intelligent person.

I thought this was worth a recommendation.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am well aware that the Prime Minister is trying to change the subject to save the Treasury Board president's skin, but he will not distract us.

She was lax in tolerating Mr. Radwanski's lavish spending. She ignored complaints made by officials to the Public Service Commission, which reports to her. There are limits to being irresponsible.

Not only did she tolerate abuse, she endorsed it. Why?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I never thought I would see the day that I would have to set the member for Roberval straight about the structure of the Parliament of Canada, but I will have to do so.

The Privacy Commissioner is a senior officer of Parliament. The Public Service Commission does not report to the President of the Treasury Board, but directly to Parliament. That is why members of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates have started to review the spending of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. That is why they have also started to question the Public Service Commission. That is exactly what should be done. We are in a situation—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough.

* * *

[*English*]

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, the reign of terror for Canadian taxpayers continues. There has been a major breakdown in controls over financial management in the government. The Auditor General noted a lack of visible action by the Public Service Commission to address staffing abuses.

What action has the Prime Minister himself taken to ensure accountability? More important, what is he doing to ensure that the Treasury Board guidelines are being followed to protect Canadian taxpayers?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Public Service Commission reports to the House of Commons. There is a committee of the House of Commons that looks at the supervision of all the commissions that report directly to the House of Commons. These are not the responsibility of the government. We do not want to intervene too much because those members would be the first to say that we are trying to take away the independence of the people who have the job to oversee the government.

Oral Questions

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that the Auditor General has uncovered serious financial abuses by the senior officials in the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. This is unprecedented. These offences involve falsifying financial reports and potential criminal offences.

My question for the Prime Minister is, just how many Royal Canadian Mounted Police investigations are currently underway in his government and what is it going to take for this abuse to stop?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a system that works. If somebody is abusing public funds, the Auditor General does her job. If there are criminal activities, it is referred to the RCMP.

I can see the frustration of the leader of the Conservative Party at this moment, but I want to tell him, I do not want to be a marriage counsellor because he has problems with the marriage with his friends in front.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the Auditor General said she was outraged by George Radwanski's spending, and rightly so. In her words, "he abused funds". However, the amount of Canadian tax that Canada Steamship Lines avoided paying is at least 12 times bigger than the amount wasted by Mr. Radwanski.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister, if the Auditor General's report about Radwanski, as he said a few minutes earlier, shows the system is working, does the government's failure to listen to the Auditor General on tax havens show the system is broken?

• (1430)

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been through this discussion with respect to the treatment of business income earned through active business entities based in other jurisdictions in the past. In a number of cases we have tax treaties with countries like Ireland and Barbados. In those cases, in order to make changes, obviously a renegotiation of those treaties would be required. No, we do not unilaterally abrogate them and they do serve some important other purposes.

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OTTAWA CENTRE CONSTITUENCY

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one would think that the government would want to get a little more comfortable, a little more forthright, about defending the former finance minister's corporate record before the election.

Mr. Radwanski's waste of public funds is truly appalling, but the cost attached to Mac Harb's Senate appointment is eight times bigger than the amount wasted by Radwanski.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister, when will the voters of Ottawa Centre get to decide whether Mac Harb is worth the cost and call a byelection?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there will be a byelection when the decision is made, but I do not know why the NDP is so anxious to lose another fight.

* * *

VOYAGEUR COLONIAL PENSION FUND

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions is supposed to protect the pensions of federally regulated workers, but that is not how it is working. In OSFI rulings, the new Liberal leader got an \$82.5 million payout on his pension plan, his managers got \$10 million, but his Voyageur bus drivers just got stiffed. Their pensions went down 30%.

My question is, does the finance minister really think that those rulings are fair?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member knows first of all that OSFI operates on an independent basis. Second, the review of the pension plan is based on the agreements that were in place between, in one case, the union and the company and in the other case, on behalf of the non-unionized employees and the company. OSFI's responsibility to ensure that the terms of the contracts were fully respected was one that they undertook and which they carried out with the independence upon which the office is based.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest the minister take a look at the backroom dealings that the former finance minister was involved in.

The Liberal leader's pension payout: \$82 million. His Voyageur manager's pension payout: \$10 million. Reductions in the pension for Voyageur bus drivers: 30%. Revealing the scandalous behaviour of the new Liberal leader: priceless.

When will the Minister of Finance do his job and order an independent audit of that file?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, accuracy of allegations: zero. Responsibility of accusations: zero.

I am getting a little fed up with the fact that these people come into the House and cast aspersions against an honourable person, suggesting that in no circumstance can somebody with broad business interests ever hold an important office in Canada because somebody over there is going to come in here and make unfounded allegations that are completely scurrilous. They are irresponsible.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FORMER PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has stated that the office of the Privacy Commissioner does not report directly to Treasury Board. The Auditor General, however, is clear. She said, “Nevertheless, if central agencies”—such as the Treasury Board—“become aware of wrongdoing by parliamentary officers,”—such as the Privacy Commissioner—“they are obliged to take corrective action.”

In the light of this analysis by the Auditor General, will the Prime Minister admit that his statements are only intended to create a diversion and protect the President of the Treasury Board, who has not done her job?

• (1435)

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be a little more careful about what the Auditor General actually said. I have quoted her exact words, from her report and from the other statements she has made.

At the moment, we are on entirely new ground. The Auditor General is auditing another officer of Parliament, which raises questions of accountability and oversight of officers of Parliament. It is very clear that I will work with the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates and with the officers of Parliament to put a new system in place.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is not new ground; this is old Liberal territory. Every time there is a problem, it is the fault of the public servants. Every time there is a problem, no minister is responsible. That was the case with Alfonso Gagliano, and he became an ambassador. The minister will soon become a senator or whatever. It is their way of burying problems, by blaming other people.

I ask the Prime Minister, who has spent his career accepting the unacceptable, if, for once, he will say, “What was done was wrong and it is our responsibility. Radwanski was wrong and the President of the Treasury Board—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we did. When the House committee responsible for these matters looked into the affair that led to Mr. Radwanski's resignation, we asked the Auditor General to carry out this study, on the recommendation of the committee.

The Auditor General is also an officer of the House of Commons, as is the President of the Public Service Commission, which reports to the House of Commons. It is the duty of members of the committee, which includes some members of the Bloc Québécois, to examine the issue and make their recommendations. At present, this matter has been treated fairly and equitably by all the parties involved.

* * *

[English]

SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, last week the Supreme Court ruled that the government's changes to

dangerous offender laws made it easier for murderers and rapists to serve their time in the community rather than the prison they deserve.

Now the Liberal government is trying to pass a sex offender registry that excludes the names of those convicted of preying on children.

Why does the Solicitor General insist on protecting the interests of convicted criminals when they are destroying the lives of Canadian children?

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member on the other side knows very well that Bill C-23, the sex offender registry, was based on a consensus of all federal, provincial and territorial ministers.

They are meeting this week and should all the jurisdictions come to a conclusion that there should be retroactivity, the Solicitor General is more than open to discussing it, but all jurisdictions will have to agree.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that is absolute nonsense. There was no such consent. Provincial ministers are telling this minister that there is no consensus on that point.

In 1995 the government changed the law to provide house arrest for dangerous offenders instead of prison. Now, despite the protests of provincial ministers, convicted child molesters will be exempted from the national sex offender registry.

The Solicitor General continues to ignore the interests of children. Why?

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the interest of fact, the member should recall that in Calgary on November 6, 2002, the federal, provincial and territorial ministers approved the registration scheme as set out in Bill C-23.

The bill was then tabled in the House on December 11, 2002. When the hon. member says there was no consensus, he is not stating the facts. The fact is there was a consensus.

* * *

[Translation]

FORMER PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

Mr. Robert Lanctôt (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board has been totally remiss in her duties by sanctioning all the errors committed by the former Privacy Commissioner.

How can she justify not having followed up on the Public Service Commission investigation triggered by two complaints from employees speaking out against the way things were being done in the Privacy Commissioner's office?

Oral Questions

●(1440)

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we are mixing apples and oranges. The Public Service Commission reports directly to Parliament. When it carries out an audit and finds staffing shortcomings, the organization in question must take corrective measures, directly. The commissioner is an officer of Parliament.

That said, there are recommendations relating to the Treasury Board Secretariat in the Auditor General's report, and it is clear that, with our interim Privacy Commissioner, we have already undertaken to implement all necessary measures to remedy the shortcomings pointed out.

Mr. Robert Lanctôt (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, indeed it should look into the shortcomings, because there are certainly some, no doubt about it.

How can the President of the Treasury Board deny that, by refusing to do her job and to monitor government spending in compliance with the administrative procedures that are supposed to be in effect, she has lacked courage, been remiss in her most essential duties, and become an accomplice to the mismanagement, to put it mildly, of Mr. Radwanski?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the hon. member for Châteauguay likes to exaggerate. Could we stick to the facts? All of the points raised today were discovered by parliamentarians as the result of an investigation carried out by parliamentarians, who then asked the Auditor General to act.

In her evaluation, the Auditor General makes some highly specific recommendations to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, which reports to Parliament, to the Public Service Commission which reports to Parliament, and as well to the Treasury Board Secretariat —

The Speaker: The hon. member for Okanagan—Coquihalla.

* * *

[English]

TERRORISM

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Libyan embassy in Ottawa is providing backdoor travel visas to help terrorist fundraisers transfer hundreds of thousands of dollars to violent groups abroad. It does not stop there and this is where the Prime Minister comes in.

According to senior Canadian intelligence officials a Hamas front group, the Jerusalem Fund for Human Services, is raising dollars in Canada right under the Prime Minister's nose. The Prime Minister has been aware of this group's activities.

Why has he refused to give the order to shut it down?

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a legislative process has been put in place to deal with the global threat posed by terrorism.

The Criminal Code at this time contains 31 entities and the assessment process for other possible listings continues and is ongoing.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I wish to quote from a Canadian Alliance access to information request. It states:

—fundraising in support of violent foreign struggles takes place in Canada... Front groups operating in Canada include the Jerusalem Fund for Human Services (Hamas Front)—

This came from a secret intelligence memorandum to the Prime Minister, not to the Solicitor General, over 36 months ago. He still has not ordered this group's assets frozen or its activities stopped.

Why does he ignore his security advisor and allow terrorist groups like this to operate with impunity? He is not protecting Canadians. Who is he protecting?

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one thing is clear, the member is absolutely wrong when he says that our law enforcement agencies are not protecting Canadians. Canadians share and believe in our national law enforcement agencies.

There is a clear process for listing entities. We will follow the process and we are following the process. When we have security and criminal intelligence that follows the process that allows us to list, we will.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, high tides and hurricane Juan have combined to create tremendous destruction to property in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Much of this damage has been to wharves and fishing harbours that are the key pieces of infrastructure to the economy of many coastal communities.

What is the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans doing to ensure the safety and accessibility to wharves affected by hurricane Juan?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his pertinent question.

First, I would like to express my condolences to the families of the individuals killed during this terrible storm. I would like to thank all Canadians who have been working together on cleaning up, restoring power, and bringing life back to normal.

DFO staff are currently assessing the damage to wharves and fishing harbours caused by hurricane Juan. My department is committed to keeping harbours critical to the fishing industry open for business, in good repair and accessible. Priority is being given to urgent cleanups required to ensure public safety.

The Minister of National Defence, the member for Halifax West, and myself will be travelling to Nova Scotia tomorrow to meet with officials.

Oral Questions

●(1445)

CANADA CUSTOMS AND REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, the theft of 120,000 identities from Revenue Canada computers undermines the credibility of Canadian identity documents.

Has the Government of Canada provided the United States security and immigration officials with the 120,000 Canadian identities stolen from Revenue Canada in the event that these names are used to gain illegal access to the United States?

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that there was a theft of computer equipment from our Laval office. The computers did not contain any personal or business income tax information.

They were old databases, primarily from the construction industry and from EI CPP decisions regarding employment.

We have taken immediate action to review all of our processes and to ensure that the 120,000 people affected receive information on how they can protect themselves.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question was, did the minister contact the United States security and immigration officials in the event that these identities are used to gain illegal access to the United States?

If this happened on September 4, why did we wait a month to notify the victims?

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I confirmed, we did have a break-in. Computers were stolen containing information in old databases that had to be rebuilt. They did not contain factual income tax or business information on individuals.

I can tell members that we acted immediately. The police were on the scene within 15 minutes of the break-in. The fact that the computers were stolen was the result of human error. A server was left out.

The long serving employee of the CCRA feels terrible, as I do. We are notifying people. We want to ensure we get to the right people.

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HEALTH

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the health minister received a wake-up call about women's health, which again is directly linked to women's income.

Eight out of ten single mothers are low income wage earners, more than six times the rate of partnered mothers. They are five times more likely to succumb to diseases such as anorexia, and more than four times as likely to suffer violence. These factors are health risks.

Before debt reduction becomes the government's economic priority, will the health minister make the case that alleviating poverty for single mothers is important too?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has made it very clear that we understand that dealing with the challenge of poverty is very important. Dealing with

that challenge is important in terms of ensuring people good health and access to education.

I take very seriously the comments made by the hon. member in relation to health challenges, especially health challenges for single mothers in our society.

I remind the member that the provinces and territories are the primary deliverers of health care in this country. We work very closely with the provinces and territories to ensure that everybody understands the prerequisites for healthy living.

I look forward to working with her and others.

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[*Translation*]**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the latest report by the Canadian Labour Congress showed that only 33% of women and 44% of men contributing to the employment insurance program are entitled to benefits.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Will he recommend that his government colleagues vote tomorrow in favour of Bill C-406, to rectify the errors made in the last reform of the unemployment insurance program, in 1996?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member is an experienced member of this House. He is no doubt aware that there is a free vote on private members' motions, at least for Liberal members. Perhaps this is not the case for his party.

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[*English*]**CANADA CUSTOMS AND REVENUE AGENCY**

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we notice a pattern for the Minister of National Revenue. Last December she lost hundreds of millions of dollars in fraudulent GST claims. In May personal information was stolen from her department and offered for sale to organized crime. Last week confidential tax information was mailed to the wrong address. Then today we have learned that Revenue Canada has suffered what insiders are calling the biggest loss of personal information in Canadian history, when the confidential files of about 120,000 more people went missing.

Why is it that this minister in particular has such a terrible record of mismanaging Canadians confidential files?

• (1450)

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us forget the rhetoric and talk about an issue that is important to Canadians, and that is there was a theft. We had a break-in in the Laval office. Six computers were stolen. One of those, which was being used as a server, contained some old databases, particularly as it related to the construction industry and to some EI decisions.

We all feel very badly about that. The police are on the scene. The RCMP are investigating. We have taken every action to notify those people so they can protect themselves and we have given them the information they need on how to do that.

That is what Canadians expect and that is what we are doing.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, at least the Minister of National Revenue is consistent. Each time there is a disaster in her department, she orders an immediate review. Each time, after the problem is publicized and after personal information of Canadians oozes out of her control, she hits the panic button and promises to investigate and review the matter.

Her latest effort promises a sweeping review of security but only after critically sensitive, confidential information has got out into the public and 120,000 people now have to wonder what happened to their social insurance numbers, names and confidential information.

She is very concerned about bad publicity but not much about good management. Why is it that she seems to be incapable of managing the information entrusted to her?

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me give the member opposite the facts.

The fact is that one of those computers was being used as a server. It should have been locked up for the night. All our laptop computers are encrypted. They are state of the art, world class. We have never had that encryption seal broken.

In this case, an employee, a long time good employee of the agency, did not put the server back into the secure room as should have been done. That is CCRA policy. He feels very badly, as we do, and we have taken appropriate action.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only are there more than five million surplus social insurance cards in circulation, not only are copies of income tax returns sent by mistake to other people, but now 120,000 names, addresses and other information, including SINs, have been stolen from Canada Customs and Revenue Agency computers.

Does the Minister of National Revenue not realize that if she does not take steps to prevent fraud artists from getting their hands on basic data, Canada could easily become the fraud capital of the world?

[English]

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately break-ins do happen and equipment does get stolen on occasion. In this particular instance, the police were there within 15 minutes of the break-in.

Oral Questions

The six computers that we stolen did contain some information, a regional database on decisions relating to employer-employee status. We have taken action to ensure that over almost 600 of our offices check and review their security systems.

We are notifying those 120,000 people even though no information on tax and personal business information was included.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of National Revenue explain why she waited one month before warning Canadians and Quebeckers that their names, addresses and other information had been stolen, and that they might have been victims of fraud?

[English]

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. The information in the one computer, which was being used as a server and which was stolen, contained old databases. They had to be rebuilt. We did it both electronically and manually. It was extremely labour intensive.

However we wanted to ensure that we were contacting the right people. We have done that. We are ensuring the people have the information they need so they can protect themselves. We are also conducting and I have ordered a thorough security review not only of our policies and of our sites but also to ensure that all our employees are up to date on our procedures.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is another day and another scandal. It is becoming clear now that the Liberal government has no idea how many millions it is wasting. Supposedly to save money, it wants to claw back extra sea pay from our sailors who are overseas and it intends to privatize our coastal border patrols. Yet now we learn of a “serious billing irregularities” surrounding a \$76.5 million computer contract at DND.

After all its previous billion dollar boondoggles, why has the government not put safeguards in place to protect Canadian taxpayers?

• (1455)

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member were informed, he would know there is absolutely zero clawback from any sailor. That was made clear some days ago.

On his other question, the department takes extremely seriously questions of financial management. We have taken the following actions. The routine auditing system in this case worked and identified the problem. The department initiated its own internal audit and also sought external auditing assistance. The department requested that the RCMP review this matter and an employee has been terminated.

Oral Questions

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that action was not taken until the media threatened to expose this.

This latest scandal comes at a time when the defence minister makes the outrageous proposal to privatize our coastal border patrols because our military simply does not have enough airplanes.

If the minister cannot properly oversee contracts at DND right here in Ottawa, how in heaven's name will he supervise private contractors conducting air patrols over our borders?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. member has his facts wrong. The department took this action in terms of auditing well before the media became aware of the story. That action was taken a long time ago. The case was referred to the RCMP some time ago, before the story broke.

The department has behaved responsibly. The department takes this matter extremely seriously. The auditing is ongoing. The case has been referred to the RCMP and an employee has been dismissed.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Given that the energy bill is currently under review in Washington, I want to ensure that the government is still committed to protecting the Arctic national wildlife refuge from drilling for the protection of the Gwich'in people of the north.

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for both his question and his interest in preserving the rights of the Gwich'in people and the communities of the north.

The government remains absolutely committed to making representations to the senate, to the house committees, to all concerned and to the administration about drilling in the Arctic wildlife preserve. We consider this to be detrimental to the interest of the Arctic communities themselves and very threatening to the fragile Arctic environment.

We will continue to press our case with the American authorities.

* * *

TAXATION

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, federal and provincial Liberals have been cutting deals ahead of the Ontario election. This hidden agenda is never good for Canadian taxpayers.

Has the government made plans with the provincial Liberals to harmonize the GST and the PST within Ontario?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): No, Mr. Speaker. I know the Alliance has been doing its best to help the re-election of Premier Eves in Ontario. I can say that its success is just about equivalent to its success in marrying up with its friends down the aisle.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I will put that assurance of the no to harmonization in the same place as the promise of the Liberals to scrap the GST.

The cost of harmonization is borne directly by an added tax burden to the Ontario taxpayer. The additional taxation costs to Ontarians will be in the range of \$1 billion.

Is the government—

The Speaker: Order, please. It is almost impossible to hear the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, who has the floor. Somebody will have to reply and how anybody will hear, I do not know; I cannot. The hon. member has the floor. We want to hear her question.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the previous member already has.

Is the government prepared to add another \$1 billion to the burden of Ontario taxpayers through the integration of the GST and the PST?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will certainly make note of the hon. member's doubts about whether harmonization would be a good idea.

In the meantime I see that she has joined the former leader of the Ontario Conservative Party, Mike Harris, in presuming that Mr. McGuinty will win the election this week, which is right.

* * *

● (1500)

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Gaspésians, the people of the Acadian Peninsula, artists, the Maritime Fishermen's Union, the UPA Federation, the Regroupement des mariculteurs du Québec, the Southern Gaspé Professional Fishermen Group, all these people are asking the department to enforce section 35 of the Fisheries Act with respect to the assessment of the Belledune project

Will the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans wait until the name of every resident of the Gaspé is on the list before finally taking action?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I am somewhat startled by the hon. member's request that I misuse federal legislation to encroach on provincial jurisdictions. This would mean that New Brunswick is not able to decide what is good for its people. As long as federal environmental standards are respected, it is totally within its right, and we respect its rights.

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Bob Wood (Nipissing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we approach November 11, MPs such as myself start planning for the various Remembrance Day activities in our ridings. This year veterans affairs will be sending one complimentary commemorative wreath to each MP instead of each branch of the Royal Canadian Legion.

Does this mean MPs have to pay for additional commemorative wreaths?

Hon. Rey Pagtakhan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of State (Science, Research and Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, laying wreaths at Remembrance Day is indeed a beautiful Canadian tradition. It shows our continuing respect and tribute to veterans and their comrades for their service to our country.

Indeed, the policy has been changed, but let me assure members that should they wish additional wreaths, they should please send in their requests. There will be no charge for any number of wreaths that they request.

* * *

FISHERIES

Mr. Jim Pankiw (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the fisheries minister is stubbornly refusing to end the race based fishery on the west coast. In fact the government is appealing two court rulings which state that the Indian only fishery regulations are offensive and illegal. Both judges characterized the regulations as discriminatory and the government's own polling shows that Canadians do not support special race based privileges for Indians.

Why is the minister refusing to scrap the racist Indian only fishing scheme?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I assume the member is an expert on racism because he speaks to it often.

I want to assure him that once we heard from the court, we ended the pilot sales agreement. The decisions are now under appeal and therefore I will not discuss them. However we have been able to negotiate a selective fishing agreement with one native community.

We always look for ways to incorporate the native communities in the commercial fishery in a way that respects their culture and their rights.

The Speaker: Order, please. The Chair has notice of a question of privilege. The hon. member for Laval Centre.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIVILEGE

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during oral question period, the Prime Minister did me the great honour of quoting a few lines from a speech 20 lines long.

Most certainly, that quote will have struck a sour note for both those here in Parliament and those listening to us.

Privilege

I would therefore ask for permission to read in its entirety the twenty or so lines from which the Prime Minister took his words.

Mr. Speaker, before discussing this appointment, I would like, on behalf of the Bloc Quebecois, to acknowledge the work of Bruce Phillips who, in spite of often extremely difficult circumstances, did a professional job. Mr. Phillips can only be praised for the impartiality and common sense that he displayed.

At this point, I think that the Parliament of Canada and all Canadians and Quebecers want the Privacy Commissioner to be someone with good judgment and with the ability to objectively evaluate the facts before him.

We congratulate Bruce Phillips and we wish him a new career that will allow him to use his skills for the benefit of society.

As for the appointment of Mr. Radwanski, anyone taking the time to read his resumé can only agree that this man has a very extensive knowledge of Canadian politics. He is most certainly a brilliant person, a person with a superior intellect.

We all know, however, that these qualities are important but do not necessarily provide all the rigour required to hold an office that must be totally exempt from any partisan behaviour. The Bloc Quebecois will not approve this appointment for the simple reason that Parliament must be allowed to ask questions to a candidate to the position of Privacy Commissioner.

This is another appointment made by the executive branch of government and it could be perceived as a political appointment. I believe the government—the one that is still in office—would definitely not want to give that impression. I humbly suggest that the government order that this candidate be called by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to answer the questions of members of Parliament. In my view, this is the least we can ask in a parliament that claims to be the most democratic and the best one in the world.

• (1505)

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, members can endlessly read excerpts from *Hansard* in the House, the fact remains that an option is available to members who a not satisfied with a minister's answer, and this includes the Prime Minister. This option is not to dream up a question of privilege, but to move the question to adjournment proceedings and, at that time, to read whatever they want in support of their position. That is the procedure to follow, and these are rules we have all unanimously approved in this House.

The Speaker: No doubt, all hon. members, including the minister of state, appreciate the clarification made by the hon. member for Laval Centre. However, as the minister of state indicated, this is more of a question of privilege of a personal nature. The hon. member gave clarifications, putting an end to the debate for the time being. All hon. members always appreciate clarifications.

[English]

We have another question of privilege by the hon. member for Delta—South Richmond.

Privilege

COAST GUARD

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my compelling case I would like to bring to your attention a couple of passages from Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, in particular pages 226 and 227, where he notes:

—contempt of the House has no limits. When new ways are found to interfere with our proceedings, so too will the House, in appropriate cases, be able to find that a contempt of the House has occurred.

At page 235, he states:

What constitutes an improper means of interfering with Members' parliamentary work is always a question depending on the facts of each case.

According to a Speaker's ruling from March 21, 1978, at page 3975 of *Hansard*, it states:

If the Speaker feels any doubt on the question, he should...leave it to the House.

The member is entitled to receive the benefit of the doubt.

That being said, over the past couple of years there has been increasing concern about the ability of the Coast Guard to perform its functions. Much of the information that outlines the impact that these cuts have had have come from concerned members of the Coast Guard.

Now in an effort to stem the flow of information to parliamentarians, the commissioner of the Coast Guard has ordered all staff members who talk with a member of Parliament to report their conversations within 24 hours. This effort at intimidation is intended to shut down the flow of information to myself and other concerned parliamentarians.

The directive that went to employees immediately raised concerns. Let me quote a September 2 memo from one Coast Guard manager. He said "I am getting inquiries about this form. It appears they are being denied access to their elected member of Parliament and feel this is violating their rights. Please provide me with more clarification on what is the intent of this form and when it should be used"

I think the reality here is that the rights of members of Parliament are being impeded, so to speak, by this order by the commissioner of the Coast Guard.

Surely, as I indicated, many of the issues and concerns that have been raised over the past year about the inadequacies of the Coast Guard and its inability to perform its functions have come from members of the Coast Guard themselves who are concerned about the public's safety.

There is no whistleblower protection, no protection for these members if they come to us as members and seek our assistance and try to assist us.

The commissioner of the Coast Guard is attempting to intimidate Coast Guard staff and, in effect, is preventing myself and other members of Parliament from carrying out our duties.

Mr. Speaker, if you find that there is a prima facie case of privilege I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

● (1510)

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to respond to this question of privilege that the hon. member has raised.

It seems to me that if in fact the Coast Guard might have told its employees not to speak to members of Parliament and that if they did they would be penalized, then my hon. colleague might have the basis for a complaint in this regard.

However the fact that a department or agency has asked its employees to inform their superiors if they want to raise an issue with a member of Parliament about the operations of the department, I do not find that nearly so striking or alarming and I do not think it raises a question of privilege.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, I believe the member from the Alliance Party, who raised the issue, does have a very serious concern that could easily be a breach of members' privileges.

As members of Parliament we deal with public servants everyday. We depend on them and certainly we can say that in most cases we get tremendous support and response from them. However, when instructions are given from above, from management circles, from directors or from ministers, where they are basically told "If you are contacted"—and this was the gist of the form as I have seen it—"by a member of Parliament, please note it and the topic and advise us immediately", then it would certainly create awareness in some person working within the lower levels of any department, the frontline personnel who deal with many of our concerns.

I really think there is intimidation there. I believe our privileges are being interfered with and I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to consider it seriously.

The Speaker: In his comments the hon. member for Delta—South Richmond indicated, as did the hon. member for St. John's West, that some of these employees may have felt intimidated. I have no doubt that may be the case but even if I were to find that it was, how does that impact on the privileges of members of this House? That is the issue that I feel I have to deal with as Speaker in making a ruling.

Despite the very able arguments of the hon. member for Delta—South Richmond, I am not persuaded that the privileges of hon. members are in any way impeded because these persons may have felt some intimidation in that they had to report meetings they had with MPs.

The Standing Committee for Fisheries and Oceans, in its work, is free to call these people and ask them questions. Once called before a committee they can be required to testify under oath. Therefore there is no question that the committee and members have full access to the information they need through other avenues than having private meetings with members of the Coast Guard. The committee can make its own decisions in this regard. It is master of its own proceedings and members can take full advantage of that and get the information they need

Therefore I am afraid I cannot find any question of privilege raised in the matters before me today.

Supply

On a point of order, the hon. member for Fraser Valley.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION REPORT

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday you asked for additional information on the point of privilege I had raised in the House regarding the release of the Public Service Commission audit on the office of the privacy commissioner, and I would like to bring a little more information to your attention.

In the report is a brief description of the background that triggered the audit. The report states:

As a result of an assessment of the risks to the integrity of the staffing process at the OPC, the PSC will undertake an audit of staffing and recruitment at the OPC. This audit has been initiated to address concerns raised by the PSC's Thematic Review on Competency and Fairness, the PSC's assessment of departmental staffing performance, in addition to a formal request from the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates regarding the OPC's staffing practices and its management of staffing.

The audit's terms of reference clearly indicate that they were supposed to report to Parliament. The terms of reference are as follows:

The audit team will report to the Commission on its findings, conclusions and recommendations with an objective to provide a final report to Parliament, in both official languages, by September 30th, 2003, consistent with the intention of the Office of the Auditor General. Investigation reports, if required, are subject to the Privacy Act and will, as a result, be provided to those directly involved after they are finalized.

Mr. Speaker, I would just bring to your attention that, although initiated by the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, the request was made that this information be brought to the attention of Parliament. The fact that it was released first to the media, then to the public and then finally to Parliament, to me is at odds with not only conventional practice but also at odds with the direct request made by the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates earlier.

• (1515)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Fraser Valley for his additional assistance on the point. I will keep it in mind when preparing the ruling that I am hoping to give very shortly on this important matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: When the House broke for question period, the hon. member for Surrey-Central had 10 minutes remaining in the time for questions or comments in respect to his speech. Questions or comments?

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the subject of debate today is one which has been before

us previously and may well be before us again. It is an initiative proposed by the hon. member who moved the motion that Canadians look at proportional representation, or at least engage in a referendum considering the adoption of a proportional system of elections to bring members to the House of Commons.

Over my years here, I and I am sure most of my colleagues in the House, have had some introduction to proportional representation as an electoral mechanism. It is not used generally in this country. It is not used generally in our neighbour to the south. It is used in a new way in election to the legislatures in, I believe, Wales and Scotland in the United Kingdom. It is not used yet, and who knows, it may never be, in the mother of parliaments, at Westminster in the U.K. The system is used in differing ways in different countries around the world.

The reason people, institutions and academics put forward proportional representation as a mechanism for electing persons to assemblies and parliaments is that from a general philosophical point of view a proportional representation system provides a better mathematical reflection of parties and the views and ideas of parties based on a party system. It is not that the individuals who put forward these proposals think that our system is irrevocably broken. They generally are trying to make our system a little better. However, as I have looked at this over the years, I think we are served quite well by our present electoral system.

Those alleging that something is broken and has to be fixed may well do so. If something in our system is broken or something needs revision, updating or fine tuning, and there may be things that need updating, I am of the view that it is not our electoral system. It may be that the way we do things around the House of Commons needs to be updated. It may be that members of Parliament have to do things differently.

I maintain that there is nothing wrong with the way that we got here. Our system, sometimes called first past the post, is not only adequate, it has served us extremely well. For reasons I hope to review in my remarks here today, it serves us extremely well and I believe, better than any other system that might be proposed.

I do not look negatively on those who do propose it though. They are simply doing their jobs, thinking out loud. There are probably not too many university political science classes looking at these issues that do not think somewhat positively about a proportional representation system. It seems pretty mathematically fair.

In our system now, which as I said is sometimes called first past the post, there are winners and losers. Of course there are in any election. In the current system some people complain that the government in power in our Parliament, whichever party or coalition of parties that may be, from time to time can obtain the majority of seats in the House having received less than 50% of the popular vote in the country. That is mathematically possible; in fact, it is mathematically frequent. That is the current arrangement in the House of Commons. However, as I will point out, the system serves us very well in Canada.

Supply

• (1520)

The current system of electing members to the House puts the emphasis on members. Voters in a constituency elect a person, a member. For most elections that person is a member of a political party, but sometimes independents run. Party affiliation has proven to be fundamental in our Canadian democracy and in most democracies around the world, however, it is not the essential element. It is fundamental, but not the sole basis on which we elect representatives. In most constituencies, voters look at the person who seeks to hold office. Sometimes they look at the party, sometimes they look at the person, and sometimes they look at the leader of the party. However the emphasis, I repeat, is on the member.

Some may say that in the current system the party in power can have a majority in the House while holding less than 50% of the popular vote, and that may be true as an overall picture. It does not always mean that the party in government has managed to obtain more than its mathematically fair share of representation across the country. In our current electoral system it is completely possible for the governing party to obtain fewer seats in various parts of the country than is reflected either in the mathematical percentage of popular vote or in the seats obtained in the House from that region. A party could obtain 20% to 25% of the votes in a particular region of the country but end up with almost no seats. The flip side of that allows the House in the election of members to reflect the views of the country at the time of the election with the focal point being the election of the member and not necessarily his or her party.

The proportional representation system as I understand it involves bringing into the House of Commons after an election additional persons, not because they were elected by constituents, but based on lists put forward by the parties. If party *A* happens to elect 50 members of Parliament and also has 30% or 40% of the popular vote, it will also be able to appoint additional members from lists put forward by that party. That allows the completion of a mathematical equation, but it also essentially allows individuals who were not elected to come into the House.

Those individuals will have been appointed, and that is not something the House of Commons has ever really entertained with much relish. It has never happened. It sounds more like the unelected Senate. It is the concept of putting people in the House of Commons who have not been elected by constituents but rather are people who have been taken from lists provided by political parties. Canadians may like to do that, or they may not. I personally do not favour the process of bringing people into the House just because they were on a list. I personally like the process of election from a constituency.

Let me address the election of a member from a constituency. All of us in the House represent constituencies directly. We serve in the House as representatives of all those people. We also fulfill what has been called an ombudsman role.

• (1525)

If something is not working properly, if a constituent has some difficulty with the federal government, the member acts in the role of a Mr. Fix-it or Ms. Fix-it. That role of fixing things that are administratively broken or unfair falls to each one of us who is elected from a constituency.

If we were to adopt a proportional representation system, I suggest there would be a breakdown in that role simply because the persons chosen from the lists provided by the parties would not have been elected in a constituency. They would not have a connection to the street, to the constituency, to the neighbourhood, to the people. Their presence in the House would be as a result of a party pecking order that had placed them on a list, not because Canadians had chosen them to represent them in the House.

Members in the House may also question the fairness or equity of having other members in this House who did not have to carry out the role of ombudsman, who could simply operate freely without having to account to a constituency. That is what the currently proposed proportional representation system would offer us. That does not appeal to me. It may appeal to some others in the House and it may appeal to some Canadians, but it does not appeal to me.

I do not want to see a diminishment in the role of members, or at least an unfairness, inequity or discrepancy creep in to what we in this House have provided as a service to Canadians since the time of Confederation.

I will now move on to the major reason I do not subscribe to a proportional representation system. For simplicity and rather than tying my tongue up, I will refer to it as a PR system after this in my remarks.

It is really broken into two parts. The major reason has to do with the structural bias, the structural suitability of our current first past the post system for a federation like Canada. Most in here will agree that the first past the post system contains a slight bias in favour of enabling a party or a coalition of parties to form a majority in the House. There is a slight structural bias. As I said earlier, a majority government can be formed with less than 50% of the popular vote.

That bias allows for the creation of a majority government which, most people will agree, provides more political stability. Between elections Canadians usually look for that type of stability. Not all Canadians are in favour of the government that happens to be in power from time to time. Stability is a very special commodity that we look for in our political system. That bias in favour of being able to create a majority government is, I suggest, an asset for this country. It is sometimes described as the genius of the parliamentary system.

It is noteworthy that the parliamentary system has found its way all across the world. In the original parliamentary systems, the ones that were put into place prior to, let us say, 1900—I think Australia was founded in 1900. Its lower house is first past the post. I believe its Senate has a modified proportional representation mechanism. But the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States, the early democracies, very successful countries, have somehow managed to hobble on into the future with our first past the post system. That is testament to the genius of the system.

• (1530)

As for this particular structural bias of the first past the post system to allow a government majority and avoid splintering the representation in the House to detract from that political stability, I suggest it is an asset. That is not necessarily so, as I have said, in every political science class across the country. In political science classes they do not have to run the government or a country. They just get to talk politics. One of the great beauties of the university campus is precisely that. That is where we get a chance to think and to be intellectuals. In this place, we have real politics and we have a country to govern.

That was my description of the first part of that structural bias that I wanted to articulate. The second part pertains more to what I believe Canada needs. What does Canada need in an electoral system? I may bore everyone in here by restating what Canada is in real life on the world stage. We are a huge country of many regions, many different points of view, many cultures, many languages and many religions. Just the difference in regions is enough to create differences.

Every one of these regions of our country is quite capable of spinning out political thought and political ways of doing things. We are a federation of ten provinces and three territories, but we are much more than that as well. We are not just a collection of ten provinces; we are a collection of peoples. And we need a system of government that will bring us together, not one that will reflect the parts and pieces but one that will bring us together.

I would suggest that any federation as a system of government does not need or is less likely to need or to be served by a PR system and is more likely to need and want and be better served by a first past the post system, one that has the bias in favour of the formation of a majority government. That is why I think a PR system will not serve us well.

We need a system that is more likely to overcome all the regions, languages, cultures and religions that could pull us apart and could generate splinter parties, a lot of parties. We must keep in mind that in this country the taxpayer finances political parties. The taxpayer picks up a piece of the tab, so in a country where we are picking up a piece of the tab and we have regions and groups that are quite capable of generating splinter parties, we could end up with a mulligatawny soup.

Those are my remarks. I am very supportive of our current system. I do not think it is broken.

• (1535)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is an important topic we are discussing today because many Canadians have become concerned about democracy in terms of the value of their input as well as its future. We have seen the fact that young people often do not participate because they do not feel they have a voice.

I listened to the member's comments with regard to concerns he has identified about PR, saying, for example, that federations would not be well served. I would like to ask a couple of questions.

Supply

First, there are 25 federations in the world and more than half of them use PR: Argentina, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Bosnia, Brazil, Germany, Mexico, Russia, Serbia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland and Venezuela. Australians, for example, have a strong national identity. They have strong convictions and are a major player in the world. They are a federation that uses PR. I think that is a good example to show that we can actually have it. To address the shortcomings of Australia would be an interesting response which I would like to hear.

My second question is on the comments with regard to taxpayers' finances. As we know, we are going into an actual change in the financing of political parties and contributions. It is based essentially on proportional representation. It is based upon the percentage of votes received, so how does the member wrestle with that direct contradiction of saving first past the post and then at the same time financing based on proportional representation?

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, in relation to Australia I hope the hon. member will agree that it is only the Australian upper house that uses PR. The lower house is still elected just the way we are here. The lower house is usually the democratic house, if I can put it that way.

His list of democracies speaks for itself. I do not think there is any need for Canada to emulate Argentina or Serbia or Italy. I think Canadians believe we do just fine here.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Germany, New Zealand—

Mr. Derek Lee: Second, there is no difficulty at all with—

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: —George Bush.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member who moved the motion obviously wants to take over. Perhaps he would like to answer the question.

The Deputy Speaker: I am not sure about answering the question, but I suspect there is another question coming.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a question in view of the fact that only three democracies in the world with more than 8 million people use the pure first past the post system: India, the United States and us. Let us not forget that George W. Bush got 550,000 fewer votes than Al Gore, yet George W. Bush is president. In view of the fact that only three countries in the world use this system of pure first past the post, I just wonder why the member across the way can defend not taking a look at bringing in a measure of PR and letting the people decide through a national referendum.

Every emerging democracy in the world has looked at our system. The Soviet Union collapsed and they all looked at our system and at other systems. Not one new country decided to adopt the first past the post system.

If no one is adopting it, people are moving away from it and we only have three countries with more than 8 million people using it, why is this member stuck in the past? Why is he so conservative, so archaic and such a dinosaur in terms of his thoughts on electoral reform?

Supply

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for allowing me a response. I hope he will keep to himself while I answer his question. He did not want to listen to my last answer.

I accept that other mechanisms we use here in this country will look at proportional voting in the prior election; I do not have a problem with that. But I have already clearly stated why I believe first past the post serves Canada. Other countries are not walking away. Other countries may not be adopting the system. I do not think Canadians want to adopt the American system or the Australian or the Argentinian. I think we have a system that works real well now. I am saying, "If it's not broken, let's not fix it".

• (1540)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to go back to an issue that I think is very important and that is political financing, where we are using proportional representation to determine the finances of the member's party.

How does the member reconcile this direct conflict? The Liberal Party is going to receive financial contributions from the taxpayers based upon the percentage of vote that they received in the election. At the same time they will not accept proportional representation for the seats they would actually get through the voting system.

How does the member reconcile this conflict, a clear conflict? They are getting the cash, but they will not allow others to get the representation.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, the member refuses to simply accept that our electoral system elects members.

If we are talking party financing, then I am happy to look at the proportion of vote that a party gets, but if we are electing MPs we are electing MPs. We are electing MPs, real MPs who represent real constituencies, not MPs who come from party lists and pieces of paper and who are party hacks, but real MPs. That is what our system elects to this place now. I maintain that this is exactly what Canadians want to have in place for the next while.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where the member gets the idea of party hacks from unless he is looking at the Senate, where prime ministers in the past appointed a lot of party hacks. I do not want that kind of system.

What I want is an open, democratic system where we have the best of both worlds. We have local MPs, such as in Germany. There are 13 countries using the mixed member proportional, where they have local MPs and they have PMPs also elected proportionally. The proportionalists are used to compensate for discrepancies in the first past the post system. Those MPs elected on the proportional lists can represent regions. They can be elected directly. There is no reason why they cannot.

We can use such things as a single transferable ballot. There is no reason why we cannot have rules and regulations that say that people that appear on the lists have to be democratically elected through a convention, through a primary, through one member, one vote, or through a single transferable vote. Then they are responsible to their own constituents in their own province and their own region.

The senators today are supposed to be representing their provinces. We have six in our province of Saskatchewan who are

supposed to represent Saskatchewan. There is no reason why we could not have some proportionally elected MPs from Saskatchewan to represent Saskatchewan as a whole.

There is nothing there that contradicts anything he is saying. They would still be accountable. They would still be elected. They would still be accountable to constituents every four years when they would go back for election. They would still have riding offices. They would be no different from us. They would be elected riding by riding. We are elected riding by riding. They would still have constituents. Their constituencies would be bigger, but they would still be accountable. It is still the same principle.

This is the kind of thing that operates in 13 countries in the world and there has been no conflict in terms of class one and class two MPs. I wonder what problems the member sees with that kind of system.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I think the member's articulation of the problem is bang on: there are two classes of MPs. I do not like two classes of MPs. If the MPs are appointed from lists, then it is no different from having the Senate appointed from lists.

If the system were to allow for the election of the so-called PR representatives I would not criticize it so aggressively, but right now all the systems I have seen involve the party hacks list and members sitting in a House who do not represent a constituency and who are accountable not to particular electors but to party administrations.

While that may work in some countries, I believe that this country is best served by the existing system, which has, I agree, the bias in favour of producing a majority in the House without necessarily having a majority of the popular vote. I like it and I do not think it is broken.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, the member's provincial leader, Dalton McGuinty, is willing to put to the people of Ontario a question on electoral reform, including PR. I searched his website. I have a copy of his statements here. I wonder whether the member would support his provincial leader in doing that and, if so, why would he not support the same thing at the federal level?

He also knows that his dear friend, the Liberal premier of British Columbia, is looking at electoral reform and possibly also at proportional representation. The Liberal premier of Quebec, Jean Charest, referred to it in the throne speech, referring to PR in the election after the next as being part of the way to elect members to the national assembly.

This is not alien to the thoughts of various Liberals across the country. Does he just object to this at the federal level or does he object to the principle right across the piece?

Supply

• (1545)

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I am not so sure that the individual mentioned is my leader. My leader sits right over here on my left, but the member can draw connections wherever he will.

I have to be very brief. I have no problems with any province looking at PR, not at all. They will make their own decisions. But a province is a province, which is so big, and Canada is a country of regions, which is much bigger.

I have already indicated why I like the structural bias in the current system. It might be interesting to see the provincial experimentation if they really do go there. I am not so sure they will. If they do, I will look at it objectively.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was not particularly surprised by the comments of Liberal members, but I am grateful for the motion introduced by the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle.

However, before I read the motion, I want to talk a bit about the Liberal Party's opposition to this motion. It is rather easy to identify its reasons for opposing this motion.

There is some pretty deep thinking involved here. The party in power thinks that if this is the best country in the world, with the best electoral system in the world and the best government in the world, then nothing should be changed. Except that I will shake up the Liberals a bit by advising them to read a certain UN report—wake up everybody—because we are no longer the best country in the world. Our rating has slipped. The Liberals are so used to being the best that they ensure we are also the best at scandals and fraudulent activities. To this end, they exaggerated and extrapolated their obsession with being first at everything. This is true when it comes to politics, expect that, at some point, we need to slow down. Other people should do that. The courts will rule too on their waste and spending habits, on the somewhat less elegant ways they compensated their friends or those to whom they gave money, later asking for 12% back. This was the case in some provinces or some organizations. Fortunately, that way of doing things has been rectified.

So it is understandable, but perhaps we should look at reality in 2003 and say that examining a position does not necessarily mean one admits to being “the worst”. There is some place between the “best” and the “worst”. Do not worry; if we study this, there will be no problem.

But this debate is on the motion of the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, who appears to have been making this a personal issue for a number of years. Permit me to read the motion:

That this House call upon the government to hold a referendum within one year—

I like this part of the motion better.

—to determine whether Canadians wish to replace the current electoral system with a system of proportional representation and, if so, to appoint a commission to consult Canadians on the preferred model of proportional representation and the process of implementation, with an implementation date no later than July 1, 2006.

Personally, I think it would have been much better to ask for the creation of a committee that would hold public consultations and report back in 2006. For reasons I do not understand, they want to make the process more complicated. But it is hard to be opposed to the principle.

We could hardly oppose it, for one simple reason: in Quebec—another distinction or difference—we have not been afraid to engage in this debate and have been doing so for more than 40 years. Mr. Speaker, I realize that you are very knowledgeable about the political parties and politics in Quebec. I am not telling you anything new, but this might be new to a few members in the House.

Over the years, the various political parties tried many times to introduce proportional representation. It was under the René Lévesque government that the process went the furthest with Minister Robert Burns and his excellent deputy minister, Raymond Faucher.

At the time, there was a public consultation process. A bill was also introduced in 1984 concerning territorial proportionality. It was defeated by the caucus after having been supported by the Premier and the leader of the opposition.

So much for transparency in democracy. The Premier and the leader of the opposition agreed, but the caucus defeated the motion for territorial proportionality. At the time, the leader of the opposition was Claude Ryan.

In February—this is a little like what the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle is asking for—estates general were held on electoral reform. Countless stakeholders offered their views. These estates general travelled throughout Quebec and there was a large meeting with more than 1,000 people. People were able to discuss which electoral system they preferred or thought to be best suited to the reality of a modern Quebec.

The Liberal Party is currently reviewing the issue and a bill should be introduced during this term. However, there is a small problem. The Liberal Party made a campaign promise to introduce a form of proportional representation for the next election, but after the election they said it would be for the next election, in other words, in five or six years, and that they would review the issue in the meantime.

Forty years might be a long time, but at least we are tackling the issue and working on improving the system. When the government is ready, the work will have been done.

What the Bloc Québécois appreciates is that the motion by the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle does not call for the change to be immediate. That is why we are surprised to see the Liberal's opposition. What we are being asked is to be ready when the time comes, when the change needs to be made.

For example, when we proposed that a commission be set up to address a single currency, they said “Look at the Bloc members. They want us to have the U.S. dollar.” That is not it at all. As they say, when the train pulls into the station, we need to be ready to get on board. So it is better to study the question before something gets imposed upon us. The same goes for proportional representation.

Supply

Are we going to wait until we have a federal election turnout of 42% before we address the question of why people do not get out and vote? There is perhaps a defect or shortcoming in the way MPs represent their electorate. Perhaps there is a shortcoming in the amount of work MPs who are not in cabinet do. Perhaps there is a shortcoming in the present electoral system.

If we study this system and reach the conclusion that the system we have is the best, then we stick with it. But if we are confident that the present system is the best, we should not have any problems about comparing it with other hypotheses so as to be able to state at the end of the process that the status quo should prevail.

● (1550)

We are so confident that we do not even want to talk about it; we want to hide it, set it aside, save it. What a great show of confidence.

It seems to me that we are clearly in favour of introducing some form of proportional representation. There lies the question. A form of proportional representation does not mean a uniform system across Canada. There may be a middle ground somewhere. At the very least, there are elements of the proportional system that could help enhance democracy and the representation of citizens in the House of Commons.

Because of the first past the post system, political parties that do well in an election sometimes get blanked out. We find that unfortunate.

This proportional system could have been put forward or examined at the time when the reform of the electoral system was dealt with in committee, along with the new ridings and the appointment of returning officers.

There is also a flaw in the Canadian electoral system in that 100% of the 308 returning officers are said to be appointed by the governor in council. The Chief Electoral Officer—and if ever there were a non-political officer, it is he—has requested the authority to appoint returning officers, through a competitive process, which the government party refused, of course.

In committee at the time, I argued that there should be no hesitation. I am convinced that there are competent Liberals. They may not all be competent, but there must be a few who would go through the competitive process and keep their jobs. However, the Liberals are so sure that their returning officers are good, competent and hard-nosed that they will not consider having a competitive process or proportional representation. That is what I call confidence.

In our internal documents, we have noted that the proportional system is an approach that should be part of a larger effort to enhance political institutions and parliamentarians. The confidence bias the public has for Parliament may be a solution. Under Bill C-34, the ethic counsellor will not be the only one resolving the whole world's problems, but this study could also provide a solution.

We support the principle while at the same time saying that our ultimate goal is to represent the people of Canada well, as long as we in the Bloc Québécois are here. Our ultimate goal is not to improve the system so that it can be used for another 125 or 150 years and

work to our advantage. On the contrary, we want to get out of it following a winning referendum on sovereignty.

However, on the other hand, as long as we are in the system, it is very much to our advantage to ensure that voters in Quebec are recognized in a Parliament whose electoral system could be modernized.

The most important part of the NDP motion concerns public consultations. Bogus prebudget consultations are held. On major international agreements, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade holds consultations that are, more often than not, not very serious. And, moreover, when it comes to something as important as the electing representatives, nothing is said about the way in which public representatives are chosen.

The Bloc Québécois supports this motion primarily in terms of this need for consultation. Such consultations would lead to an exchange of ideas on the issue and would lead to future replacement models that could work in Canada.

However, we question doing this so early in the process. Studies were doubtless undertaken by various committees, or studies could be undertaken before launching this consultation, to allow people to discuss, using concrete examples, as we heard earlier in this House, those countries which have a different electoral system from our own but which are not necessarily banana republics. There are other countries and other electoral systems.

In representative democracy, the way that representatives are elected is extremely important, since this mechanism translates the public's wishes into the number of seats each party obtains.

● (1555)

There are two major types of voting systems: majority voting and proportional voting. In the majority system, constraints related to governance dominate, while in the proportional system, constraints related to representation are predominant. There are mixed systems as well, aiming at a solution lying somewhere between the two, and that, I think, is what Canada should look into.

Each of these types is divided again according to voting methods. Thus, even though we are in a majority system, there are different kinds of majority systems.

At one extreme, there is the first past the post majority system, the one used in Canada, the United States and Great Britain, the preferential system, as in Australia, and not so far away, there is the two round system used in France. In the last election in France, the importance of the two round majority system became apparent.

On the other hand, in the other type of voting systems, there are proportional elections that can be absolute, as in Israel or the Netherlands, that is with one huge electoral district, or moderate proportional systems with larger or smaller districts, as in Norway, Switzerland and Belgium, with a much higher rate of participation.

We are dealing here of countries with a recognized democratic system, countries that are not in the third world, democracies that could reasonably be taken as inspiration for improvements to our system. From another point of view, some say no, our system is so good that we do not even dare to compare it with others.

Finally, there are mixed systems that combine elements of the majority and proportional systems, for instance those in Germany, New Zealand, Japan, and Russia. There are variations in the mixed systems too. They can be of the reciprocal type, as in Germany and New Zealand, where the seats attributed proportionally are intended to compensate for those filled by a majority. That is one model we might consider as suitable, or at least which might provide Canada with some inspiration.

In contrast, in Russia and Japan, it is a mixed cumulative system, and the element of compensation is lacking. When correcting any failings of the current system, we must not make voting more complex for the voters, thus pushing them farther away from their representatives; we must ensure that they at least understand who their member of Parliament is, and that there are no more ridings and no more party representatives. Thus, if this study is done, one priority must be to maintain the close link between the voter and his or her representative.

There is no sense in trying to correct a problem by creating an even bigger one. That is why I am describing systems that exist in other countries. I think that if we implemented this in Canada, it would have to be done slowly and in stages, to allow the public to properly understand the improvements that we want to see made to the current electoral system.

Of the 53 most stable democracies—in other words, where democratic elections are held at regular intervals, countries with at least 3 million inhabitants and a multi-party system—there are 25 that have proportional representation, 15 that have a first past the post system and 13 with mixed member proportional. Consequently, we can deduce that there is no magic recipe or miracle formula.

If out of 53, there are 25 with proportional representation, 15 with first past the post and 13 with mixed member proportional, that means that culturally and politically, people have to identify the system that best suits them during the development of their country, and that electoral systems can evolve, as society does.

The first past the post system may still be used—this was pointed out earlier by the Liberals—in many major democracies, such as the United States. But we must not forget that George W. Bush was elected with a 50% participation rate and that roughly 50% of those people voted for him. Therefore, roughly 25% of the Americans elected their president.

●(1600)

In this regard, there was a minor problem in a state where his brother was governor.

An hon. member: Minor. How reasonable.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: There was a minor problem that was resolved by that state's supreme court. However, they have a good system. Obviously, they will not correct this. They will even elect Arnold Schwarzenegger; wonders will never cease.

Supply

The United States is therefore an important democracy that still uses the first past the post system, as does Canada and Great Britain. There is also France which has a two round, first past the post system.

It is important to point out, however, that this system is losing speed and is less and less popular throughout the world, particularly in democratic countries. For example, in 1993, New Zealand traded its first past the post system for a mixed system. I suppose that this was preceded by a study. It is not likely that the President or the Prime Minister of New Zealand one day decided that, "Tomorrow morning, we will have a new system". New Zealand conducted studies and decreed, in 1993, that the new electoral system would be a mixed member proportional system to better represent voters.

Great Britain plans to reform its electoral system in the near future. The inconveniences of the American electoral system are offset by the fact that the government is formed independently of the party with the majority in Congress, and also by the fact that there are only two major political parties; obviously, the first past the post system encourages a two party system by eliminating other parties.

Canada is therefore trailing other democracies in terms of electoral reform. A study or consultations are needed to see how much our system could be changed. And if, upon the completion of the study, we decide to keep our system, we will at least have identified its main weaknesses.

Many people will say that, when it comes to models of representation or electoral systems, the first past the post system is the lesser of all evils, so we should keep it. They also say that it is the simplest. However, just because it is the simplest does not necessarily make it the best.

In conclusion, I believe that if the government wants to be prepared for the requirements of the future, for a drop in voter turnout, it would be well advised not to necessarily accept a referendum—with a little good will this motion could surely be corrected or amended—but to accept that there must be a study on the current voting system.

●(1605)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, that was a great presentation which outlined not only what is happening in our country but also what is happening across the planet.

We know many things are changing in our society now, not just the issues around our community, being the local things we do, but also in our economic development and social policy. The whole world is changing in many ways, and this is about that.

By no means is this an attack on our current system. It is an identification that we have a weakness, that we need to start to address the fact that we are being left behind. We are not even discussing the possibilities of growing our democracy to ensure it will be viable for Canadians who come forth and who feel disenchanting from it. Quite frankly, we have had people basically die for the privilege to have a democracy. At the same time, we are watching the numbers go down for a lot of reasons, and we need to address that.

Supply

I would like to ask a simple question which relates to the start of the hon. member's speech. It is the issue of whether we should send this to committee or a referendum, which obviously causes a little more complication to the referendum. It is important to highlight that we are asking Canadians if they would like to change. If they do, then we would reach out to them in terms of the study, how we want to develop the system and where we would go. It is simple to ask them if they would like to be involved with us, their elected representatives, to address democracy.

Does the member think that is important and is it a good way of describing the pros and cons of that strategy? We do not want to come through as saying it has to be exactly this way. We believe that is unfair. We want to reach out to Canadians say, "Participate with us in renewing our democracy". This is about that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Madam Speaker, I understand very well what my NDP colleague means.

Indeed, if we look at the federal election turnout rate, we see it is dropping rapidly. In 1988, it was 75%; in 1993, 69%; in 1997, 67%; in 2000, 61%. We have dropped 14 percentage points over the last 12 years. At 1% a year, as I said in my speech, the government needs to wake up and come up with some new ways to encourage participation.

I will try to give a more direct answer to the question: why am I somewhat hesitant to support the idea of a referendum. If one reads the motion, what is called for is first a referendum, second a commission to consult the public, and third, a deadline of 2006.

Right off, the process is being made unwieldy. Besides, we have too often seen referendums where rational logic has been buried or bulldozed—if I can put it that way—by arguments that are totally far fetched and had nothing to do with the debate.

In this instance, the question to the people in a referendum will be, "Do you wish to be consulted on an alternative voting system?" Then, the yes and no sides will start arguing. The no side will say that, if you vote yes in the referendum, you will no longer have the right to vote and no longer know your member, which will open the door to al-Qaeda cells. We will hear all kinds of nonsense, which I feel will interfere with our perfectly legitimate consideration of the voting system or the current electoral system.

That is why I think that giving three years to hold a referendum, consult the public and get conclusive results is to set the bar very high. I am therefore hesitant about the idea of a referendum.

I have no problem with having a study to confirm the existing voting system or change it. As I said, if the findings of this study confirm that, in terms of culture, people, our desires and wishes, the existing system is the best, at least we will be somewhat reassured.

If, afterwards, we are told that a certain type of proportional system should be phased in, then we can ask ourselves questions and perhaps hold a referendum. We should do that after, not before, and say, "Here are the findings. Do you agree with them?"

I think that it is putting the cart before the horse to say that there will be a referendum to ask the public whether it wants this to be

examined. As far as the principle of the motion is concerned, that of considering it, we have no objection.

• (1610)

[*English*]

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.): Madam Speaker, a former Indian affairs minister, Ron Irwin, had a great expression that caught my attention one day and I have never forgotten it. He said "Canada is a country that should not work in theory, that Canada is a country that works in practice". I think that is a very appropriate remark in the context of proportional representation, because proportional representation seems to make so much sense.

The idea is that people cast their ballots for a particular party, and when those ballots are counted, the leader of their various parties gets to name to this House, to Parliament, the number of members of Parliament that match the percentage of popular vote that his particular party got. Indeed, it makes so much sense that if we put that question to a referendum across the country, most assuredly people would probably support it because it seems very commonsensical that in a democracy, the makeup of this House should exactly reflect the will of the population.

However it is like so many things. What seems simple to the people at large, when one has experience in this House, one realizes that the working of democracy is much more complicated than that. In fact our system, the system that we operate under, which is a constituency system in which Canada is divided into 301 territories across the land, each politician has to run in that particular territory and has to get a popular vote in that territory. Of course the result is, as we know, that often there is quite a disparity between the number of MPs that a party returns and the percentage vote that party gets. What we do know is the system we have tends to return majority governments rather than constant minority governments, which is the case with proportional representation.

I guess my most fundamental objection to proportional representation is the power it gives to the leader. What we have there is a situation where the leader has absolute power over the members of his party, so when the election is finished, the leader gets to name the individuals who will serve in this House.

Now, Madam Speaker, I know you are liable to react in a very peculiar way when I assert this, but I am a living example of why proportional representation does not work. It does not work for those MPs who might want to have an independent voice in this House and still be a member of a particular party, a maverick MP. If I can indulge your attention for just a little, Madam Speaker, I will tell the story of my own election in 1993.

In 1993 it was the end of the Mulroney era and there was a lot of feeling against the Tories of the day. That was also the era of the Meech Lake and the Charlottetown accord. I was a journalist on leave of absence, working on a book on a military subject. I had just finished work on the book when the Charlottetown accord came up. I broke from my work and studied the Charlottetown accord. I was absolutely appalled by what I read about the accord because what I thought would occur was there would be such an erosion of federal power, the whole Charlottetown accord was going to give a lot more power to the provinces, that I felt Confederation could not possibly work.

As a former journalist, that is one business or one profession in which one is not allowed to mix partisan politics, so I had never in my entire career had anything to do with partisan politics for any party. Nevertheless, at the time of the Charlottetown accord, or shortly thereafter, Mr. Mulroney was about to call the election. On impulse, I went in and put my name in for the nomination for the Liberals in my local riding.

• (1615)

It was an impulse and my kids said “Oh, Dad, you don't want to be a politician”. My wife said “Oh, I don't want that, I've got enough problems”. Nevertheless, it was a gesture. I did not know anyone in the riding association nor anyone in the Liberal Party but I knew that on nomination night I would stand up and make a brief speech about how I deplored the Charlottetown accord, and especially the fact that the Liberals were so tame as to get on side with the Tories on the Charlottetown accord. After I did my little speech I knew I would sit down and that would be the end of it.

There were three other candidates for the nomination and they were out selling memberships and all those kinds of things. However I had no idea that the process involved selling memberships. I was a complete neophyte. At any rate, I just sat back until nomination day approached and suddenly all the other candidates for the nomination quit and a new person appeared on the scene. He was actually a former active Tory member but he had lined up with the Liberals.

When I went to the other candidates and asked them why they had suddenly quit they said “well, we had to quit because this other guy, this latecomer, has the backing of the leader of the party”, the now Prime Minister. He has the backing of the local Liberal Party machine. He had everything so they quit.

Well, I am not much of a quitter. I do tend to hang in there. Shortly after that happened, the riding association had a meet the candidates meeting. I had never met any member of the riding association up until that time. It was held in the basement of the local town hall. I went along to at least explain to the riding association why I wanted to be a candidate and all this stuff about the Charlottetown accord.

I arrived there and all these strange people were sitting at a big table and around the room. This was the riding association executive, I learned later. I did not know who they were and there were a few other people in the audience. I stood up and made my little speech but in the middle of my speech this other guy, this other important candidate, came in along the back of the room.

I had never had this experience before but we all are practised politicians here, and I am sure you, Madam Speaker, have had an

Supply

occasion where you have been speaking and thinking at the same time. Sometimes it has peculiar results here but, nevertheless, there I was talking and this guy came in with signs already printed. He did not even have the nomination but his signs were printed. They were all clapping and cheering and all these kinds of things. I was a little put out but I finished my speech and sat down. This guy stood up in his turn to great applause and all the rest of it. What he basically said was that he had been approached many times by the Liberal Party leadership in the area riding to run as a candidate for the nomination but that he had always held back because there was another possible candidate who might come forward for the nomination. He was alluding to the then mayor of the city of Hamilton and the then president of the local university. Then he said the fatal words. He said that late last week he had learned that those two important people had dropped out, that they were not going to stand for the nomination and that because there were no other worthy candidates he allowed his name to stand.

Well, I waited for him out in the corridor. He came out with his crowd and all the signs. I shook his hand and I said “Meet your unworthy opponent”.

I was born in town but I lived in a rural village for 30 years. Even though I commuted back and forth to Toronto for my journalist job, I had lived in the village for a very long time and knew a lot of farming folk. My wife was a local librarian in two places. The upshot of this is that when the nomination meeting occurred this guy was out there with his machine. He had everything. He had the signs printed and he had the buses. He had the whole thing going. He had all the money in the world. All I had were the local people.

Nomination night was held in an armoury in one of the towns in my riding. His people were on one side of the hall and my people were on the other side of the hall. To make a story short, despite all his power and the fact that he was being backed by the Liberal Party machine, I beat him and I am here today.

• (1620)

The reason I told that story is that throughout my career as a member of Parliament in the House I have never taken one dime from the party nor have I asked for one favour from the leader, and I have always spoken my mind in the House. The point is that if the leader were upset with me for speaking my mind and expressing myself, he would have to contend with the fact that I have support in my riding. I am not beholden only to the leader. I am beholden to the grassroots people who brought me to this place.

Supply

If we were to have proportional representation, people like me would disappear. Naturally all leaders, no matter how open they are or how much they might want to democratize the House, the reality is that if a leader gets to choose all the MPs in the House, then inevitably we would not have the kind of dialogue that occurs in the House. We would not have the kind of independent speaking out that occurs among Liberals on this side of the House and, perhaps more rarely, on the opposition benches, because I have to note that my experience in 10 years here is that in fact there is a tendency in opposition to conform to the will of the leadership. Whereas here, as we see time and time again and as a matter of fact is becoming a bit too common in my opinion, we see Liberal backbenchers expressing very independent thoughts. Sometimes they do not vote with the government.

It is relevant, even now, because we are in a period where we are about to change leaders in the Liberal Party. A very instructive and very important part of our democratic process is that the Prime Minister, the leader, has to hold his side together based on the confidence the members have in him. That confidence is a delicate balance between his ability to summon their allegiance based on the policies that he has and also their obligation to their constituents. All that disappears with proportional representation.

For those who complain about party discipline being too much, if we were to have proportional representation party discipline would be absolute.

There are other problems with proportional representation and some of these are very obvious. I should point out that our constituency system has worked well for 136 years, give or take a year, and has held together a country that is 10% larger than the United States—I believe it is the second largest country in the world—and has 10% of the people. We are spread out all over the country.

I would submit that we cannot compare our system, which obviously works and has worked for such a long time over this huge land mass, with a system that might be used by Israel or Italy. Either of those countries could form one-quarter of one constituency that we have in this country. The present Indian affairs minister is fond of reminding people that his particular riding is the size of France.

One of the things about having ridings and constituencies is that not only are we loyal to the party but we become loyal to not just the people in our constituency but to the concept of that corner of Canada that we represent.

When I first came here in 1993 we had a day of debate in which every MP had the opportunity to describe his or her riding. It was marvellous. It gave us a sense of who and what this country really is, because each MP bragged about the beauties or the unique characteristics of his or her corner of Canada.

In my particular riding I have seven waterfalls, which is probably more waterfalls than any other riding in the country. I can go on. When we go around this room we find that each member of Parliament celebrates the character of this country by representing a particular constituency.

●(1625)

All that would disappear with proportional representation because the leader can take members from anywhere. He can take members based on wealth. He can take members based on some sort of demographic profile. In other words, the people are marginalized in the final selection of the candidate.

Then we would get this terrible problem of what actually would happen in the House and what happens so often in countries like Italy or Israel. The reality is that in most democratic debates opinion divides roughly evenly. We saw that rather famously recently when on a motion by the opposition on upholding the traditional definition of marriage the House split on one vote, 134 to 134. It then split 137 to 135, I think it was, on the next vote.

That is a classic example of what happens all the time in proportional representation where major parties sit facing one another and very small minor parties hold the balance of power.

In that particular vote that I just described, the two smallest parties in the House, the New Democrats and the Tories, could have affected the outcome of either of those votes.

Some hon. members: Right on.

Mr. John Bryden: The members are cheering and that is exactly the point. The people who press for proportional representation are always the hopeless minor parties in any Parliament. It is because it is the only way they can have a say and actually influence what happens in the House. It is because then they have five or ten members of a party that could be a party of social left or right. It could be a party of religion or it could be a party of this or that and it is that balance of power that could actually drive the agenda of the entire House, the entire Parliament, the entire country.

I submit that history and the world are replete with examples of why that is bad for a nation. Italy alone has had countless parliaments, one after another since the second world war. There is always the opportunity of minor parties forming, four or five individuals, who could affect the outcome of major debates in the House.

Therefore we have the situation that rather than deploring the fact that our particular system tends to generate majority government, we should be applauding it. We do not have to take any instructions from Europe or elsewhere in the world. We are the model for the world because it is eminently evident that the most stable democracies in the world, Canada, the United States and Great Britain, have the same type of constituency representation that Canada uses. Certainly in the case of the United States and Canada, these are huge countries and yet we have the best democracies and we are admired around the world.

So, no, we do not have to look to other experiments that basically have failed. As the former Indian affairs minister said, "Canada is a country that does work in practice". It may not fit the arm chair theories of academics and parties on the fringe but Canada works and it works the way we do it now.

•(1630)

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to weigh in on this issue because it gets to the heart of the single most important issue, challenge and problem affecting Canadians and this House. That is the fact that we have in Canada an elected dictatorship, a parliamentary dictatorship that has been promulgated and enforced by the government for 10 years and longer.

When former Prime Minister Trudeau stood up and said that MPs were nobodys 50 feet off the Hill, what he should have said was MPs were nobodys on the Hill. This government and previous governments have eviscerated the powers of members of Parliament in the House at the expense of Canadians from coast to coast. Not only have they harmed us by removing our powers, but worse, they have harmed Canadians because ultimately our responsibility is to the people who elect us.

I say we have an elected dictatorship because for 10 years we have not had the power to represent our constituents. We are responsible to our constituents in every election but we do not have the power to represent them. We have committees that do good work, hard work, committed work, but are not listened to by the government. Members have votes in the House which they are forced to engage in, sometimes at the expense of their own moral convictions, because if they do not, the leaders, the government and the Prime Minister will thump their heads if they do not vote their way.

Are there solutions? Absolutely. We can look at the system in Britain where it has undergone a system of reformation. It has three-line whips. Why not say that any legislation that is a vote of confidence should not be a bill? Why not say that only money bills are votes of confidence?

Will the hon. member support and force and push for complete free votes in the House of Commons where no bill is a vote of confidence and will he support a reformed committee structure where the work of committees will be listened to by the government?

Mr. John Bryden: Madam Speaker, fiddle-faddle. I guess my best response is. First, I just described how the Prime Minister has not been able to control keeping members from speaking out in the House. He cannot stop us because we have the support of our constituencies. If the member feels he is not representing his constituents, that is his problem.

I have voted against the government, I think seven times. It was long before it became popular to vote against the government. I have never been disciplined as a result. As long as we here in this House, we act according to our best judgment. I have never had a problem on this side.

As far as free votes are concerned, free votes for everyone would be anarchy. It shows the naivety of that side. I have watched them for 10 years. I have not seen free votes on that side. There are far more free votes on this side. There has to be some form of party discipline because if we did not have party discipline, we would have anarchy.

However if we had proportional representation, the discipline would be so close that any independence would be destroyed. I would have thought that the member would have focused on that

Supply

rather than focusing on a system that, as far as I can see, is actually working quite well.

* * *

•(1635)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Speaker: Order please. Just before we resume questions and comments on the speech, pursuant to Standing Order 28(2)(b) I have the honour to lay upon the table the House of Commons calendar for the year 2004.

* * *

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to start off my comments by reminding the hon. member that it was the so-called, minor or fringe parties that brought in medicare, social security and pensions for the citizens of our country. There is a role for minor parties to play in democracy. The mere fact that he is trying to rout them out is not a surprise. To continue this affront is unacceptable.

At the start of the conversation, the hon. member said that it was the power it gave to leader which was a concern in terms of actual proportional representation. I would like to remind the House that it is the power that is centred around a few individuals which is hurting our country. If people are watching right now, they know the cabinet and the inner circle are the ones that are usurping the democracy of the country. It is not shared.

How can the member feel that way when he knows for a fact that we have prime ministers who have appointed candidates like Marcel Masse in Hull and Georgette Sheridan from Saskatoon. There has been direct intervention on that level? How can he accept that? The mere fact is we do not have independence on a regular basis. All of a sudden because there is a Liberal leadership void, they are voting differently now. That is not enough. How can he justify that?

Mr. John Bryden: Madam Speaker, I just made the observation that medicare and all those other fine things that the member mentioned were brought in because the Liberals supported them. This was the will of the Liberals. It was not just the NDP by any means.

As far as the cabinet is concerned, I go back to my original point that this type of parliamentary system we have works on confidence. The government is in power based on the confidence it can maintain on the backbench and it has to walk very carefully because the backbench can always turn back and derive support from its constituencies. Whereas if the cabinet and the leadership were able to control the backbench by controlling who would get to sit on the backbench, the power of cabinet would be incredibly enhanced.

I really do not understand why the member cannot put two and two together on this issue except that there probably is a problem of hopelessness sitting tight to the back corner of this chamber, having less than a dozen members. I would think that would give anyone a headache.

*Supply***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I think, if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, in relation to its study of relations with Muslim countries, a maximum of 14 members divided into several groups of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade be authorized to travel to the Middle East and South Asia from October 13 to October 26, 2003 and that the necessary staff do accompany the committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS*[English]***SUPPLY**

ALLOTTED DAY—ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Madam Speaker, our party is not exactly fringe. We have the largest membership of any of the four opposition parties today. We are third place in the polls. The Alliance is in fourth. That may disappoint the member, but that is the fact of the matter today in terms of public opinion.

He is concerned about the power of the prime minister. I want to remind him that the prime minister, and indeed all party leaders today, have the power to sign or not sign nomination papers. It is a pretty awesome power.

Back in 1997, when the current Prime Minister was the Leader of the Opposition, he appointed candidates. In my own province, Georgette Sheridan was appointed as the Liberal candidate in Saskatoon—Humboldt. I remember Marcel Masse being appointed as a candidate for the Liberal Party in Hull—Aylmer. There were two or three others also.

Does the member agree with that practice? That practice exists today, but it should not. Under PR it should not exist. My vision of a proportional representation system is one that is open, transparent and democratic, otherwise I would not support it.

Would the member acknowledge at least that the power of the Prime Minister is too great today and also the power of party leaders sometimes is abused when they appoint candidates and do not allow a proper democratic nomination process to take place? His party is guilty.

● (1640)

Mr. John Bryden: Madam Speaker, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle is an experienced member and he knows his history. When prime ministers or party leaders refuse to sign nomination papers, there is a great possibility that the person will still run and succeed as an independent or switch to another party.

The reality is that because of the constituency system any leader has to be careful. If an individual MP is very popular in his constituency, because he has done a good job, then that MP cannot be wished away as easily as someone failing to sign his nomination papers.

As for appointed candidates, the record on appointed candidates is pretty clear too. They do not tend to last very long. The prime minister or party leader can appoint candidates but so often they do not survive for very many elections. On the other hand, if someone is genuinely grassroots in our constituency system then watch out.

Mr. Joe Jordan (Leeds—Grenville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I just could not resist jumping into this with a few comments.

We do have a party system, but I would say that the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, for whom I have a lot of respect, has sound logic but that is the point. It is just sound. It is unencumbered by meaning. This party has more free votes than any other party. If we are going to be accused of not having any, then there is an issue.

In terms of proportional representation, I do not think our system works all that well because voter turnout has been declining. I have been at debates myself where I have been sorely tempted to vote for the Green Party candidate because he was the best person in the room. I am a candidate who won by 55 votes. If anybody should be against this in the interest of self-preservation, it is me.

I will stand proudly and support this motion by the NDP, not because I think it is the panacea to solve our problems but because we have to keep the issue on the radar screen, explore the options and figure out a way to reconnect with the people in our ridings. Environmental issues and the issues that these supposed minor parties are pushing are important and we need to hear their voices.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I do not think there was a question in that. We are out of time but we will have a short answer.

Mr. John Bryden: Madam Speaker, voter turnout is poor because the Liberals have been so successful and the opposition have been such a failure.

We have a range of opinions here. We can get everything on this side that we do not need the opposition. That is why I think we do not—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): On a point order, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, discussions have taken place between all parties with respect to the taking of the recorded divisions scheduled for Wednesday, October 1, 2003, and I believe that you would find consent for the following motions. I move:

That the recorded divisions scheduled for Wednesday, October 1, 2003, on M-387, C-406, M-392, M-288 and if necessary M-83, take place at 5:45 p.m. with bells at 5:30 p.m.

And, that after the said votes, the House continue to sit for one hour in order to consider government orders.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise on the NDP motion by my friend from Regina—Qu'Appelle, which reads:

That this House call upon the government to hold a referendum within one year to determine whether Canadians wish to replace the current electoral system with a system of proportional representation and, if so, to appoint a commission to consult Canadians on the preferred model of proportional representation and the process of implementation, with an implementation date no later than July 1, 2006.

I am not a supporter of proportional representation as the best electoral reform for Canada, but I will be voting in favour of this motion because I think it is far overdue for Canadians to have a say in the undemocratic nature of our institutions and processes.

There are several variations of proportional representation. Under a pure PR system, every party with one per cent or more of the vote elects the appropriate number of MPs from a political party's list. This system, and most variations of it, becomes confused in a federation like Canada. Does the list simply mean a pool from which the leaders choose, or must there be a list from each of the provinces so that Parliament, while made up of people selected from a party list, will also represent the provinces in proportion to their population?

Another key question is, how would these lists be compiled? Would there be conventions and if so, would they be province by province, perhaps by patronage or lineage? Some systems, recognizing that there must be regional representation or constituencies, have a mixed system in which half the MPs are elected off a list, the others by the first past the post method that is currently used in Canadian elections. New Zealand and Germany are examples of this compromise.

I have a great deal of respect for proportional representation or some variation of it as an alternative to the status quo, but I do not believe that simply changing our current first past the post system of

Supply

electing MPs to PR, proportional representation, would be a healthy or wise reform. In fact, I believe particularly that as a stand-alone reform it would lead to unhealthy and unintended consequences for Canada.

First, as with all PR systems, Canada could quickly devolve into constant minority governments, rendering Canada ungovernable absent potentially exotic coalitions of rivalling single issue parties, language based parties, or aggressively regional parties that would be destructive of the development of a national vision.

Second, by simply reforming the mechanism of electing members of the House of Commons and ignoring the need for Senate reform, accountability of judicial appointments, accountability in the election of the Governor General, and a host of other problems, we would be prescribing a placebo for Canada's ills rather than engaging in a more comprehensive and thoughtful process of democratic reforms broadly.

The two most effective critiques of our current first past the post system is that one, it elects MPs who may not be representative of the majority of their constituents, and two, it can therefore produce governments that are not themselves reflective of the wishes of the country. This second critique is of particular concern because of the nature of the concentration of power in the hands of a majority government and the possibility of an increasing disconnect between the governed and the government.

This is fueled by an important consequence of questions that must be considered by political scientists. The first question asked is, what is the worst form that government can take? The answer is tyranny. To what form of tyranny are democracies prey? The tyranny of the majority. To that end, mature democracies that understand this danger inherent in democratic systems have developed mechanisms to check power, mechanisms such as bicameralism in Germany and the United States, a dual executive such as in France, a separate elected executive such as in the United States, and internal governing mechanisms that check majorities from imposing irrational, ill-conceived or incongruent ideas on a hostile or unconsenting public.

There is no perfect electoral system for all countries. There are only perfect ideals to which systems can aspire to embrace. Those ideals include, but are not limited to, fair representation, voter participation, national unity, intellectual identity and civic participation. While I cannot address each of these elements in the time that I have, I can say with certainty that proportional representation, as a stand-alone reform as is proposed by this motion, would not move Canada forward democratically but would move us backward.

Supply

Proportional representation might make sense if we had an elected Senate to balance the needs of regions in our national discourse. Proportional representation might make sense if we had some mechanism to ensure that citizens would still have a say in who their specific representatives would be rather than having elites thrust upon them via party lists, where candidates are placed by patronage and plucked from by sequence.

I believe in free elections for the Senate, free votes for the House, open nomination contests in parties, empowering Canadians with ballot initiatives, curbing the power of cabinet to stifle free speech and free votes. I believe in separating the executive from the legislative branch to allow Canadians to democratically choose their head of state in a stand-alone vote.

• (1645)

Canada is a profoundly undemocratic country with archaic institutions, an arrogant and unaccountable Governor General, a Senate staffed with allies of political elites, leadership campaigns without the free sale of memberships, and new campaign finance rules that force Canadians to finance ideas to which they do not subscribe through the direct financing of political parties with taxpayers' dollars.

We need a wholesale reform of our democratic system in Canada. Proportional representation is one of many possible reforms. I support the motion as a means of starting a broader discussion to renew Canadian democracy and ensure Canadians have a say in the governance of this great country. However, were this referendum ever to come about, I would vote against proportional representation and in favour of a broader dialogue for broader reforms.

Madam Speaker, I am out of time as I would like to divide my time with the member for Prince George—Peace River, but I am prepared to entertain any questions.

• (1650)

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very interested in the hon. member's comments. It seems that he basically wants to take the best out of both systems and somehow evolve that. I personally do not think we can do that. The fact of the matter is proportional representation has a lot of distractions from it and we should criticize it.

One thing that has developed in the debate is the theory that if we have proportional representation, we will bring back the voters to the electoral process. I have some statistics that came from the Centre for Voting and Democracy website, the people who are in support of proportional representation. It shows countries like Switzerland with only 38% voter turnout although it has proportional representation. It shows Italy with a high percentage of voter turnout but a very unstable government.

The previous intervenor talked about Germany. When I was in Germany I was amazed that the Green Party actually had captured control of the government to some extent. It was very much a minority party. The net result was that it had actually got that country to shut down all its nuclear reactors. That party did not represent anyone but it controlled the balance of power.

I cannot understand why the member would support something which he himself has admitted is an erroneous evolutionary process for Canada.

Mr. James Moore: Madam Speaker, the reason I support this motion while at the same time I oppose proportional representation personally is that, and I suppose this is the difference between being a Canadian Alliance member of Parliament and a Liberal member of Parliament, I entrust Canadians to make some of these decisions. I believe in open dialogue and open conversation.

I do agree frankly with the member's criticisms of proportional representation, particularly as seen in Germany and especially as seen in Italy. As it has been organized in Italy, I think it has caused incredible political problems and organizational problems in terms of governing.

I do agree, as I said in my speech, that when one is setting up a democratic system and setting up a mechanism by which people are electing their government, there is a list of virtues. Among those virtues are voter participation, stability, intellectual identity and so on.

In my view, while it is immensely important, voter participation does not override the need for stability, particularly in the example which the hon. member gave in the case of Germany of smaller political parties, perhaps overly ideological parties, perhaps single issue political parties or as could be the case in Canada, political parties identified by language or by aggressive regional anxieties.

If that were to take place, we would have to have a coalition government, which is almost always the case in a proportional situation. Then we really could have a situation where rather than having high voter participation, people think there is high voter participation and therefore we have the rule of the majority because more people are voting, but the reality is we have more political parties that represent a segmented view of the public.

As a consequence, what would happen is we would actually in an inverse way have a tyranny of the minority. We would have broad political parties, a wide number of political parties in a coalition government but no single political party would have a large enough constituency to be able to speak for the majority.

In an inverse way, and a kind of perverted way, while we would have an elevated number of people participating in a campaign, because we would have more political parties without which a coalition could not survive, we could have a tyranny of the minority through smaller political parties that are driven by regional anxieties, by language, by religion and by all kinds of other things. That is why I am personally opposed to proportional representation particularly as a stand-alone reform.

Supply

At the same time, coming back to answer the specific question, the reason I will be voting in favour of the motion is I believe that Canadians are intellectual beings who are fully prepared for the discussion and prepared for the dialogue. I am prepared to put forward my view of proportional representation and a wholesale reform of our electoral system, Senate reform, reform of how we choose the Governor General, holding judges accountable and so on. I am prepared to have that debate. I am not afraid of giving more power, money, control and influence to Canadians, but then again, I am not a Liberal.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like the member's thoughts on the fact that we are moving toward election finance reform based upon proportional representation but at the same time some members on the government side do not want to move toward proportional representation for members in the House.

Mr. James Moore: Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague from the NDP. I am not surprised, nor is he that the government has not had particular forethought in this regard.

That is one more argument that we in the Canadian Alliance have to oppose the government financing bill. But the principal opposition I have with the government's campaign finance bill is less so in terms of the incongruity with regard to financing than it is morally wrong to take money from people to be used against them ideologically and politically. I am sure even the member for Windsor West would be appalled to know that some of his money is going to finance some of the ideas that are being espoused by some of the colleagues who are sitting not too far from where he is.

I am personally appalled that money from my pocket, my tax dollars, would be going to finance a political party, particularly the Bloc Quebecois, that has set forward a single ideology, whose members do not agree on taxes or on health care, they do not agree on anything, except they believe in destroying Canada. I do not like the fact that the government is forcing me to finance those destructive ideas.

•(1655)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today to join this debate. I offer my appreciation to my colleague from Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam for splitting his time with me.

I would like to read the motion. The motion forward today by the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle of the New Democratic Party states:

That this House call upon the government to hold a referendum within one year—

Were it to pass obviously.

—to determine whether Canadians wish to replace the current electoral system with a system of proportional representation and, if so, to appoint a commission to consult Canadians on the preferred model of proportional representation and the process of implementation, with an implementation date no later than July 1, 2006.

During debate in the chamber it is often not possible for the Chair to recognize everyone who would like to rise during questions and comments to question a particular member of Parliament from whichever party on his or her speech or intervention. I want to refer to remarks made by the hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—

Flamborough—Aldershot in reply to my colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

My colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca was putting forward some alternatives that he believed in and he commented on the absence of free votes in the House of Commons. Certainly, in his view and I concur with his view, this House of Commons operates very much like a dictatorship. The member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot said that free votes would be anarchy. I was appalled by that.

An hon. member: That is what he said.

Mr. Jay Hill: That is what he said in this chamber moments ago. He said that free votes would be anarchy. In other words, by extension, democracy would be anarchy because free votes, like a referendum, should be representative of the people.

If I am representing my constituents of Prince George—Peace River on any particular piece of legislation in a free vote and I can throw off the shackles of party discipline, the party policy or the leader's position and vote the wishes of my constituents, I would submit that is democracy. Yet the member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot would state that free votes would be anarchy.

My colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca put forward the suggestion that the vast majority of votes in this place should not require party discipline. This is something that has always puzzled me. Why do the old parties that have been around this country for so long rely on party discipline? They rely on the whips. They rely on the system of either discipline or reward to ensure that their government members, when they are on the government side of the House, vote for their legislation.

If their legislation were good legislation, if it was in the best interests of not only Canadians at large but in the best interests of the majority of the constituents in the majority of the ridings, then it should pass through this chamber and become good law. Yet we have seen time and time again—certainly I have seen it in the 10 years that I have been a member of Parliament—where laws are passed in this place and we find out in hindsight that some of the opposition members actually knew what they were talking about when they submitted amendments and spoke of concerns they had with the legislation. Indeed, sometimes there is even a free spirit on the government backbenches who also raises concerns about a piece of legislation and occasionally even puts forward an amendment.

•(1700)

Almost invariably all those amendments, despite their worth, are voted down. They are thrown away because they are not the minister's or the cabinet's or the Prime Minister's amendment. Many times, certainly in the 10 years I have been here, that legislation comes back to haunt the government. It is either thrown out in court decisions or overruled. If we had taken a bit more time, if there had not been the party discipline in this chamber, where the government whip cracks the whip and forces government members to support a piece of legislation, we would have had better laws in Canada. Yes, I submit it would take longer to pass laws, but we would have better laws as a result of it.

Supply

We are talking about proportional representation as a replacement for our first past the post system in Canada. I will be voting for the motion put by the New Democratic Party. As my colleague from Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam has stated, I will be voting for it even though I personally do not think that proportional representation is the best system for Canada. My preference would be a preferential balloting system where Canadians, at the time of an election, no matter how many candidates they had to select from in their constituency, would mark their selections from number one, being the first choice, to however many there were.

I need to explain how this system would work. When the results are being tabulated by riding, if a candidate did not have more than 50% of the first choice votes when the ballots are counted, then the ballots of the candidates with the least first choices would be recounted based upon the second choices on those ballots and reassigned to the other candidates. If that, in effect, gave one candidate more than 50% of the ballots, then he or she would be declared a victor in the election. That is the system that I personally support. But, as my colleague has said, we need to move this debate along.

Our system is widely viewed as archaic. Indeed, many of the rules that we have in the House of Commons are more archaic than in the mother parliament in Great Britain. We have not evolved even as much as the parliament in Great Britain has evolved over time.

We can further the debate about what type of electoral system Canadians want, and what reforms they want to see, by supporting this motion. It is a step forward.

It is not the ideal system. I was pleased to hear a Liberal backbencher earlier make a similar comment. He will be supporting the motion even though he does not recognize that it is the panacea.

It is not the be all and end all and the ideal, but at least it furthers the debate and debate is healthy. It is a debate that Canadians should have. Canadians want to have a debate about their Parliament because, and I will sum up with this, something is wrong when we see an elected dictatorship put in place to run the business of this country with 38% of the votes in a federal election.

• (1705)

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is interesting to hear the comments from my colleagues and from the entire House.

The issue that I hear over and over is that we need to reconnect with people. Surely that is what this exercise is all about. Many people, if they express any interest whatsoever in an election but do not get any kind of payoff at election time because their candidate does not get in, find themselves wondering what it was all about. How are their views to be represented if clearly 30% or 40% of the population does not get its members or its ideas put forward? How will they feel they are being represented?

I am also concerned about the fact that only 20% of the members of the House are women. I would like to ask the member, does he think that under some kind of proportional representation plan we would be able to increase the number of women in the same way that they have in places like Scotland and other countries in Europe? I would think everyone here would agree that is a desirable result.

Mr. Jay Hill: Madam Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that it would be desirable. It would be a positive step forward to have more representation of women in the House of Commons and indeed at all levels of elected office. I certainly support that. However I do not favour any form of quota system to allow for that.

It would be demeaning to women to suggest that the only way they could get elected to the House of Commons would be for them to be placed by someone or some group on a list and somehow they could be elected that way. It would be demeaning for all of those women over the years who were elected under our present system to the House of Commons.

I believe it is a worthy goal. I would certainly be interested in hearing about ways in which that could be encouraged without actually employing some sort of quota or stipulation where, under a proportional system, a list would have to be made of so many men, so many women, so many visible minorities and so many aboriginals. I do not think that is the way to go and I would not support that.

I agree with the member's initial comments. What we are talking about here and what the motion really drives at is a way to engage the electorate. The hon. member is right on the mark when she states that there are too many Canadians who feel disconnected. They are not engaged because they feel that their vote does not count for anything. Referring to the example I used, there is something seriously wrong with our system when 62% of Canadians in the 1997 election did not vote for the government, did not vote Liberal, yet the Liberals had a massive majority that enabled the Prime Minister to act like a dictator.

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member for Prince George—Peace River and it seemed to me the one thing that was missing from his comments was the word compromise.

This is a big country and a big federation. It is the second largest geographical country in the world with a small population. The necessity to run this country as a nation is the word compromise. From our point of view, the Ontario voters must find that they contribute more to this federation than they receive from it, but mainly because they are supporting other parts of this country to bring up their standards to the standards of the rest of the nation.

That is why we have such a thing called party discipline. If people are concerned about their own well-being, they will only vote for their own well-being and the well-being of their constituents. They might be forgetting some of our aboriginal people. They might be forgetting about the health care in some of our Atlantic provinces and other places. That is why we have party discipline. There is no democracy in the world that functions properly that does not have some form of party discipline.

As a member I do not believe that our discipline is overbearing. I would like to hear what the member has to say about that. We cannot have everybody standing up here every day doing their own thing. It will not work.

Supply

• (1710)

Mr. Jay Hill: Madam Speaker, I would argue that it will work and that it should work. Government members can stand up all day long and try to defend party discipline, as the member has just done, and use the word “compromise”. I hear the word compromise and I hear that our big nation has to compromise. I believe in compromise and I think most Canadians are reasonable people, but when I think about compromise I think about the Charlottetown accord, when Canadians had the intelligence to see through that, the ultimate Canadian compromise, and vote it down. Thank goodness they did.

Mr. Joe Jordan (Leeds—Grenville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I got up earlier and gave the *Reader's Digest* version of my thoughts but I will take four minutes now.

If we throw out the partisan rhetoric, I think what we are hearing is that debate on the motion has been very interesting. There are people who are going to support this for a variety of different reasons, but I think it is fair to say we do have some issues that need to be addressed.

I will repeat my comments. I am not saying that this is the solution to the problems with democracy. In fact, to paraphrase Churchill, democracy has problems until we consider the alternatives. There are pros and cons to everything. There are no easy answers, but based on my own experience out on the hustings, people are not staying away from the ballot box, as has been suggested, simply because they think the government is doing a good job. I think there really is a disconnect out there. I think there are people who sit there and think, “What does my vote matter?” They think that the person they want to support does not have a hope of winning because that person is not from one of the mainstream parties, so they just disconnect themselves from the process.

Believe me, democracy does not work if people are not engaged in it. There has been talk of the government getting whatever the percentage was, being the government. Do not blame us. We still got more votes than the opposition parties. We are all in this together. We all have to figure out how to put in place a process that can take the needs and aspirations of Canadians and reflect them in public policy.

As I said in my earlier comments, I look at the issue of the environment. In our current system of first past the post, winner take all, 31% or less, or 39% in my case, I win the prize. That is characteristic of the fact that there were eight or nine parties running.

When the member talks about the way we run the House, I agree. The Standing Orders for the way we run the House, the lion's share of them, were put in place when we had two parties. When we get to three, four or five parties, that is where we start to run into problems in terms of representation on committees and allocation of time on various topics. I think we need to look at those sorts of things.

But what I like about this motion, and it may be a proportional ballot or preferential ballot, as they are not defining what we do in terms of proportional representation, I do not see the flaw, the problem, with putting some value on a vote that does not necessarily carry the day in first past the post but is certainly a ballot that has been sincerely put in that ballot box by a Canadian.

We could do it in a way which says that the candidates selected under proportional representation would start with the candidate of

the defeated party that got the most votes. We do not need to have the person hand picked. Again, that has not been defined in the motion.

We heard a lot of talk about Italy. I think we have to be very careful that we make a distinction between correlation and causation. Italy's democracy is rather cumbersome. Whether that is because they have proportional representation or not, I do not know. I think it is a dangerous leap of faith to blame it on PR. The same logic would suggest that we should never go to bed because the lion's share of people die in bed. I think we have to have a bit of an open mind.

This particular motion, by simply keeping the issue alive, puts it on the radar screen. I harbour no illusions as to its fate, but again I think it is worth supporting in the sense that it is not a perfect system now and we should take a serious look at anything that could potentially improve it.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): It being 5.15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

[*English*]

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Call in the members.

• (1745)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 222*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
Bailey
Breitkreuz
Cadman
Casson

Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bourgeois
Burton
Cardin
Chatters

Government Orders

Cummins
 Davies
 Desrochers
 Duncan
 Fitzpatrick
 Fournier
 Gallant
 Gauthier
 Godin
 Grewal
 Guay
 Hanger
 Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
 Johnston
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Lancôt
 Loubier
 Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
 Masse
 McDonough
 Mills (Red Deer)
 Moore
 Pankiw
 Perron
 Proctor
 Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
 Roy
 Schmidt
 Solberg
 Stinson
 Strahl
 Wasylcia-Leis
 White (North Vancouver)

Dalmond-Guiral
 Desjarlais
 Duceppe
 Epp
 Forseth
 Gagnon (Québec)
 Gaudet
 Girard-Bujold
 Goldring
 Grey
 Guimond
 Harper
 Hill (Macleod)
 Jordan
 Lalonde
 Lill
 Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
 Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
 Mayfield
 Meredith
 Minna
 Nystrom
 Paquette
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 Rajotte
 Robinson
 Sauvageau
 Skelton
 St-Hilaire
 Stoffer
 Toews
 White (Langley—Abbotsford)
 Yelich — 76

McTeague
 Murphy
 Nault
 Normand
 O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
 Pacetti
 Paradis
 Penson
 Peschisolido
 Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
 Pratt
 Provenzano
 Reed (Halton)
 Robillard
 Schellenberger
 Scott
 Shepherd
 Sorenson
 St-Julien
 Steckle
 Telegdi
 Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
 Tonks
 Valeri
 Wayne
 Wilfert

Mitchell
 Myers
 Neville
 O'Brien (Labrador)
 O'Reilly
 Pagtakhan
 Patry
 Péric
 Pettigrew
 Pillitteri
 Price
 Redman
 Regan
 Saada
 Scherrer
 Sgro
 Simard
 St-Jacques
 St. Denis
 Szabo
 Thibault (West Nova)
 Tirabassi
 Ur
 Vanclief
 Whelan
 Wood — 144

PAIRED

Members

Anderson (Victoria)
 Bigras
 Dhaliwal
 Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)
 Laframboise
 Ménard
 Paradis

Asselin
 Cauchon
 Easter
 Gagnon (Champlain)
 Marceau
 Owen
 Rock — 14

NAYS

Members

Alcock
 Assadourian
 Bagnell
 Barnes (Gander—Grand Falls)
 Barrette
 Bellemare
 Bertrand
 Binet
 Bonin
 Boudria
 Brison
 Byrne
 Cannis
 Carignan
 Casey
 Charbonneau
 Coderre
 Comuzzi
 Cullen
 Dion
 Doyle
 Duplain
 Eggleton
 Farrah
 Folco
 Gallaway
 Goodale
 Grose
 Harvard
 Hearn
 Hubbard
 Jackson
 Jobin
 Keddy (South Shore)
 Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
 Kraft Sloan
 LeBlanc
 Leung
 MacAulay
 Macklin
 Malhi
 Manley
 Marleau
 Matthews
 McCormick
 McKay (Scarborough East)

Allard
 Augustine
 Bakopanos
 Barnes (London West)
 Bélair
 Benoit
 Bevilacqua
 Blondin-Andrew
 Borotsik
 Bradshaw
 Bryden
 Calder
 Caplan
 Carroll
 Catterall
 Chrétien
 Collenette
 Copps
 Cuzner
 Discepola
 Drouin
 Efford
 Eyking
 Finlay
 Fontana
 Godfrey
 Graham
 Guarnieri
 Harvey
 Herron
 Ianno
 Jennings
 Karetak-Lindell
 Keyes
 Knutson
 Lastewka
 Lee
 Longfield
 MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)
 Mahoney
 Maloney
 Mark
 Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
 McCallum
 McGuire
 McLellan

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

● (1750)

* * *

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

The House resumed from September 25 consideration of the motion that Bill C-34, an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (Ethics Commissioner and Senate Ethics Officer) and other Acts in consequence, be read the third time and passed, and of the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment of Mr. Forseth on the motion at third reading stage on Bill C-34. The question is on the amendment.

Ms. Marlene Catterall: Mr. Speaker, I believe you would find consent that those who voted on the previous motion be recorded as voting on the motion now before the House, with the Liberal members voting no.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, Canadian Alliance members present vote yea to this, including the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the members of the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of this motion.

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, members of the Progressive Conservative Party—

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but I must go to the Bloc Québécois whip.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I wish to add the names of five colleagues who were not here for the first vote. These are my colleagues from Rimouski-Neigette-et-la Mitis, Verchères—Les Patriotes, Trois-Rivières, Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques and Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour.

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, members of the Progressive Conservative Party vote yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the members of the NDP vote yes on this motion.

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Pardon me, Mr. Speaker, but I also want to make sure that the member for Calgary Centre is recorded as voting yes. He was not here for the first vote.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Guy Carignan: Mr. Speaker, I vote against this motion.

[English]

Mr. Jim Pankiw: Mr. Speaker, I vote yes.

(The House divided on the amendment, which was lost on the following division:)

(Division No. 223)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Bachand (Saint-Jean)	Bailey
Barnes (Gander—Grand Falls)	Benoit
Bergeron	Borotsik
Bourgeois	Breitkreuz
Brisson	Burton
Cadman	Cardin
Casey	Casson
Chatters	Clark
Crête	Cummins
Dalphond-Guiral	Davies
Desjarlais	Desrochers
Doyle	Duceppe
Duncan	Epp
Fitzpatrick	Forseth
Fournier	Gagnon (Québec)
Gallant	Gaudet
Gauthier	Girard-Bujold
Godin	Goldring
Grewal	Grey
Guay	Guimond
Hanger	Harper
Hearn	Herron
Hill (Macleod)	Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Johnston	Keddy (South Shore)
Kenny (Calgary Southeast)	Lalonde
Lancôt	Lill
Loubier	Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)	Mark
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Masse	Mayfield
McDonough	Meredith

Mills (Red Deer)
Nystrom
Paquette
Perron
Plamondon
Rajotte
Robinson
Roy
Schellenberger
Skelton
Sorenson
Stinson
Strahl
Tremblay
Wayne
White (North Vancouver)

Alcock
Assadourian
Bagnell
Barnes (London West)
Bélair
Bertrand
Binet
Bonin
Bradshaw
Byrne
Cannis
Carignan
Catterall
Chrétien
Collenette
Copps
Cuzner
Discepolo
Duplain
Eggleton
Farrah
Folco
Galloway
Goodale
Grose
Harvard
Hubbard
Jackson
Jobin
Karetak-Lindell
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Kraft Sloan
LeBlanc
Leung
MacAulay
Mahoney
Maloney
Marleau
Matthews
McCormick
McKay (Scarborough East)
McTeague
Mitchell
Myers
Neville
O'Brien (Labrador)
O'Reilly
Pagtakhan
Patri
Peschisolido
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Pratt
Provenzano
Reed (Halton)
Robillard
Scherrer
Sgro
Simard
St-Julien
Steckle
Telegdi
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
Tonks

Government Orders

Moore
Pankiw
Penson
Picard (Drummond)
Proctor
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Rocheleau
Sauvageau
Schmidt
Solberg
St-Hilaire
Stoffer
Toews
Wasylcia-Leis
White (Langley—Abbotsford)
Yelich — 96

NAYS

Members

Allard
Augustine
Bakopanos
Barrette
Bellemare
Bevilacqua
Blondin-Andrew
Boudria
Bryden
Calder
Caplan
Carroll
Charbonneau
Coderre
Comuzzi
Cullen
Dion
Drouin
Efford
Eyking
Finlay
Fontana
Godfrey
Graham
Guarnieri
Harvey
Ianno
Jennings
Jordan
Keyes
Knutson
Lastewka
Lee
Longfield
Macklin
Malhi
Manley
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McCallum
McGuire
McLellan
Minna
Murphy
Nault
Normand
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
Pacetti
Paradis
Péric
Pettigrew
Pillitteri
Price
Redman
Regan
Saada
Scott
Shepherd
St-Jacques
St. Denis
Szabo
Thibault (West Nova)
Tirabassi
Ur

Government Orders

Valeri
Whelan
Wood— 131

Vanclief
Wilfert

PAIRED

Members

Anderson (Victoria)	Asselin
Bigras	Cauchon
Dhalival	Easter
Gagnon (Champlain)	Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)
Laframboise	Marceau
Ménard	Owen
Paradis	Rock— 14

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from September 25, 2003, consideration of the motion that Bill C-48, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (natural resources), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred division on the motion at the second reading stage of Bill C-48.

Ms. Marlene Catterall: Mr. Speaker, you will find unanimous consent that members who have voted on the previous motion be recorded as having voted on the motion now before the House, with the Liberals voting yes.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Does the House give its consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, Canadian Alliance members will vote yes to this motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, members of the Bloc Québécois vote no on this motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, members of the Progressive Conservative Party vote yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, members of the NDP vote no to this motion.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Guy Carignan: Mr. Speaker, I vote yes on this motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Pankiw: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 224*)

YEAS

Members

Alcock
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Augustine
Bailey
Barnes (London West)
Barrette
Bellemare
Bertrand
Binet
Bonin
Boudria
Breitkreuz
Bryden
Byrne
Calder
Caplan
Carroll
Casson
Charbonneau
Chrétien
Coderre
Comuzzi
Cullen
Cuzner
Discepola
Drouin
Duplain
Eggleton
Eyking
Finlay
Folco
Forsyth
Galloway
Goldring
Graham
Grey
Guarnieri
Harper
Harvey
Herron
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Ianno
Jennings
Johnston
Karetak-Lindell
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Kraft Sloan
LeBlanc
Leung
Lunnery (Nanaimo—Alberni)
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)
Mahoney
Maloney
Mark
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Matthews
McCallum
McGuire
McLellan
Meredith
Minna
Moore
Myers
Neville
O'Brien (Labrador)
O'Reilly
Pagtakhan
Paradis
Penson
Peschisolido
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Pratt
Provenzano
Redman
Regan
Robillard
Schellenberger

Ablonczy
Allard
Assadourian
Bagnell
Bakopanos
Barnes (Gander—Grand Falls)
Bélair
Benoit
Bevilacqua
Blondin-Andrew
Borotsik
Bradshaw
Brisson
Burton
Cadman
Cannis
Carignan
Casey
Catterall
Chatters
Clark
Collenette
Copps
Cummins
Dion
Doyle
Duncan
Efford
Epp
Farrah
Fitzpatrick
Fontana
Gallant
Godfrey
Goodale
Grewal
Grose
Hanger
Harvard
Hearn
Hill (MacLeod)
Hubbard
Jackson
Jobin
Jordan
Keddy (South Shore)
Keyes
Knutson
Lastewka
Lee
Longfield
MacAulay
Macklin
Malhi
Manley
Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Mayfield
McCormick
McKay (Scarborough East)
McTeague
Mills (Red Deer)
Mitchell
Murphy
Nault
Normand
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
Pacetti
Pankiw
Patry
Péric
Pettigrew
Pillitteri
Price
Rajotte
Reed (Halton)
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Saada

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***HEALTH**

The House resumed from May 12 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House to debate this most important and most critical issue.

The motion before the House is that of my colleague from Yorkton—Melville, Motion No. 83. I think it might be good at this stage to take a few seconds to read the motion. It states:

That the Standing Committee on Health fully examine, study and report to Parliament on: (a) whether or not abortions are medically necessary for the purpose of maintaining health, preventing disease or diagnosing or treating an injury, illness or disability; and (b) the health risks for women undergoing abortions compared to women carrying their babies to full term.

This of course is a very emotional issue. Unfortunately sometimes in life as in Parliament emotions take precedence over careful thought and looking at independent and objective truth and objective facts. This is exactly what has happened on the issue of abortion in Canada and, I would venture to say, around the world.

There are those who say that women have a right to an abortion and therefore no one should have the ability or the right to say that they may not have them.

The dilemma for Canadians is that we are all required to pay taxes and, through our taxes, to fund abortions in an environment in which medical funding is limited. This is without any firm proof, scientific or objective, that it meets the requirements of the Canada Health Act. It has always been assumed so, since the abortion rules were struck down a number of years ago. If one has the gall to even suggest that perhaps we should have a look at it, there is this huge emotional outcry and name calling that ensues. That does not contribute to a positive and meaningful debate on the issue.

I would like to point out, as my colleague did when he first spoke to this motion on May 12 of this year, that the wording of the motion is precisely the same as that which was given to him by the department when it looked for criteria to determine whether or not a medical procedure should be covered by the Canada Health Act and by funding from the central government in Ottawa.

We all know there have been several instances in our country where provinces have been punished for not complying with all of these conditions and yet there has been no proof given that this is a necessary procedure.

I would like to talk about these different points, the first being maintaining health. If pregnancy were a disease then we would all be in trouble. In fact I would venture to say that if pregnancy were a disease, which would be vigorously attacked on all fronts, then our species would cease to exist. I believe that pregnancy has always been considered a normal phase of life and it has not, to my knowledge, ever been called a disease. As far as maintaining health is concerned, it really is not the issue.

Scherrer	Schmidt
Scott	Sgro
Shepherd	Simard
Skelton	Solberg
Sorenson	St-Jacques
St-Julien	St. Denis
Steckle	Stinson
Strahl	Szabo
Telegdi	Thibault (West Nova)
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)	Tirabassi
Toews	Tonks
Ur	Valeri
Vanclief	Wayne
Whelan	White (Langley—Abbotsford)
White (North Vancouver)	Wilfert
Wood	Yelich— 188

NAYS

Members

Bachand (Saint-Jean)	Bergeron
Bourgeois	Cardin
Crête	Dalphond-Guiral
Davies	Desjarlais
Desrochers	Duceppe
Fournier	Gagnon (Québec)
Gaudet	Gauthier
Girard-Bujold	Godin
Guay	Guimond
Lalonde	Lanctôt
Lill	Loubier
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Masse
McDonough	Nystrom
Paquette	Perron
Picard (Drummond)	Plamondon
Proctor	Robinson
Rocheleau	Roy
Sauvageau	St-Hilaire
Stoffier	Tremblay
Wasylcyia-Leis— 39	

PAIRED

Members

Anderson (Victoria)	Asselin
Bigras	Cauchon
Dhaliwal	Easter
Gagnon (Champlain)	Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)
Laframboise	Marceau
Ménard	Owen
Paradis	Rock— 14

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Consequently, the bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest that he is unable to move his motion during private members' hour on Wednesday, October 1, 2003. It has not been possible to arrange an exchange of positions in the order of precedence, accordingly, I am directing the table officers to drop that item of business to the bottom of the order of precedence.

Private members' hour will thus be cancelled and the House will continue with the business before it prior to private members' hour.

It being 5:57 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

Private Members' Business

If we are talking about preventing disease or diagnosing and treating an injury, does having an abortion prevent a disease? Pregnancy is not a disease. Childbirth is not a disease. Therefore it is not logical to say that abortions are necessary to prevent disease or to treat an injury.

●(1800)

Just as a little aside with a bit of humour, I remember seeing a notice from a life insurance company stating that its policy for injury payments did not cover certain circumstances. It then went on to mention a bunch of things, including suicide, attempted suicide and so on, pregnancy and other self-inflicted injuries. We know, of course, that pregnancy is not usually a self-inflicted injury. It is just one of those normal things that mothers and fathers do in order to provide for the next generation.

I would also like to say sort of as a parenthetical phrase—I suppose the modern lingo is a little sidebar—that my wife and I have three wonderful children. In each instance their births were welcomed and absolute miracles, as were the births of all our grandchildren. I think my wife and I were more enthusiastic with the birth of our grandchildren and about the well-being of the mother when our grandchildren were born than we were when we were having children ourselves. It is a wonderful process and one which I think we ought to really be very careful about.

Then, of course, we also have illness or disability, and I think the same arguments would apply.

Those were definitions given by the Department of Health in answer to an inquiry as to how to determine whether a procedure should be covered by the Canada Health Act.

There are serious questions. There is mounting evidence that there are in fact significant traumas that are incurred in the performance of abortions. I have done quite a bit of reading on this myself. I have a real interest in books. One of the things that I sometimes do is go to the library just to see what kind of books it is getting rid of. Everyone knows about the 25¢ books that are outdated. People can buy them and take them home. I have a whole stack of books to read for that date way off in the future when I retire.

One of the books that I picked up, because of my interest in the subject, was a book entitled *Providing Safe Abortions*. I thought it would be an interesting one. It was 25¢ so I plunked down my money and walked off with the book. I began to read it. It is a fascinating book because it was written by a medical doctor who provides abortions, believes in abortions and, for the sake of training practitioners, he wrote the textbook to be used in medical colleges, which was to answer the question of what one has to do to provide a safe abortion.

I was astounded when I read that book. It was not a very thick book, maybe 150 pages or so, but it talked about all sorts of things that can go wrong during an abortion. I never knew that. Those who promote abortions want us to believe that it is just an innocuous procedure like removing the appendix or some other thing like that. I was really quite astounded that this person who wrote the book actually works in that particular area of the medical field and by all the elements that he had identified as being dangers.

I think it is just common sense that we should ask the questions. I do not believe we should refrain from asking the questions simply because we are going to be yelled at by someone. I think they are legitimate questions and we need to get the answers. If the answers come out opposite to what we expect because of the literature that we have obtained and that we have garnered, so be it, but let us ask the questions. Let us find out the true dimensions of this procedure. Particularly, in support of my colleague's motion, we need to make sure as the government that this procedure is indeed medically necessary as is claimed.

●(1805)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate the member for Yorkton—Melville for bringing the issue before Parliament. It is an important issue that has seized parliamentarians and countries around the world.

As the House will know, in 1988 the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the abortion laws of Canada. In that decision, it was not a matter of whether the unborn child was a human being. It was a matter of whose rights came first, and the courts decided the mother's rights were to be respected in advance of the rights of the unborn child.

This is an issue that will be with us I am sure for some time, but the motion does raise another element of consideration and of development as it relates to the issue of human health.

As the previous member stated, the motion asks the Standing Committee on Health to examine, study and report to Parliament on first, whether abortions are medically necessary for the purpose of maintaining health, preventing disease or diagnosing or treating an injury, illness or disability, and second, the health risk for women undergoing abortions compared to women carrying babies to full term.

With regard to the aspect of medically necessary, there is an obligation, under our publicly funded health care system, that medically necessary costs shall be covered under the Canada Health Act and under the provincial jurisdictions that basically deal with the provision of publicly funded services.

I will not go through it but at this point there is no list. It is basically a conceptual issue of what constitutes medically necessary. However medically necessary is basically driven by what the provinces have decided to either include or exclude. Over time issues could come where they would find deletions or exclusions from what would constitute medically necessary in a province, which would give the federal government and Health Canada some problem, and that action could be taken. Therefore this is a very interesting motion which has been brought forward.

I also wanted to mention that in the past year the U.S. secretary of health and human services amended the definition of child for U.S. health services purposes. The definition of child in the United States today is a person under the age of 19, including the period from conception to birth.

In the United States the unborn child from conception to birth is considered to be a person. The U.S. secretary of health and human services did this because the unbelievable procedures now being done on the unborn child in terms of health services previously were not covered under insurance programs and under Medicaid. By virtue of that change, it basically provided an opportunity for those services, to treat an unborn child with a detected malady, to be covered under an insurance plan. There has been an evolution and there are things in this regard.

• (1810)

Additionally, the tri-council policy statement, which came out in 1989 and is updated annually and is also part of our current bill under consideration, Bill C-13, protects the unborn child, being the embryo, from the 14th day forward. Why do they do that? They do it because even the medical profession acknowledges that the 14th day is when the primitive streak occurs. It is when twinning is not possible. It is when there are some physical features, pain can be felt, et cetera. Even the medical profession does not agree with the legal precedent, which is a person is not a human being until it is born and severed from the umbilical cord.

So there are different things going on that I thought were relevant to this debate.

Similarly, Dr. Françoise Baylis, the vice-chair of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research board of governors, testified before the health committee. She has written a number of articles in which she declares clearly that the human embryo is a member of the human species and that is an uncontested biological fact. This is the medical opinion.

Having said that, I want to comment very briefly with regard to medically necessary abortions and also the impact of abortions on the health of women.

There was an article by Mr. Lorne Gunter in the *Ottawa Citizen* on September 22, just a week ago. He referred to an article in the summer issue of the peer-reviewed *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons*, in which author Karen Malec laid out the case that induced abortions raise women's risk of developing breast cancer by 30% to 100% or more, whereas miscarriages do not.

Mr. Gunter went on to state, "The key is the artificiality of on-demand abortions". He went on to explain some of the more technical aspects. He also pointed out, "Cancer societies, government research institutes, pro-abortion politicians, even medical associations continue to deny the increasing bulk of evidence" concerning the relationship between abortions and breast cancer. He stated that of the 40 or so major studies on the ABC, abortion-breast cancer, link, nearly three-quarters have shown a statistically significant correlation

There is unquestionably a growing body of evidence that there are medical impacts on abortion. They vary depending on the number of abortions as well.

Every year in Canada over 100,000 abortions are performed. Assuming an average cost of \$1,000, we are talking about \$100 million and more. I am sure it is much more.

Private Members' Business

The consequences of this issue, whether it be to women's health, whether it be to the health of an unborn child who is recognized as an uncontested biological fact to be a member of the human species, is enormous and growing. The fact that the U.S. will recognize the unborn child from conception to birth as a person entitled to protection means that things are changing.

Let me conclude by simply saying that this issue is a divisive issue, I understand, but this is the place in which members should not hesitate to stand and represent their beliefs and their concerns about the rights of the unborn, the future of Canada, who will never have a chance, those who have no voice in Canada.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I feel it is my duty as a woman to take part in this debate. It is my duty because the hard won right of women to have an abortion is being challenged today. There is no doubt about it. This is the third attempt by the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville to recriminalize abortion.

He is asking, in a very underhanded manner, that the Standing Committee on Health fully examine, on behalf of women:

(a) whether or not abortions are medically necessary for the purpose of maintaining health—

(b) the health risks for women undergoing abortions compared to women carrying their babies to full term.

That is essentially the question.

We know that 1988 was a historic year in terms of recognizing women's control over their own bodies. The Supreme Court of Canada struck down legislation prohibiting abortion because it violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In its decision, the Supreme Court said:

Forcing a woman, by threat of criminal sanction, to carry a fetus to term... is a profound interference with a woman's body and thus an infringement of security of the person.

The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville is challenging this decision. In all sincerity, I doubt that the real reason he introduced this motion is his concern for the health of women who have an abortion.

Whose health is he worried about? I would remind the hon. member that, in some cases, the risks can be just as great when a pregnant woman is forced to carry a pregnancy to term under difficult conditions or under circumstances not conducive to a pregnancy. Is he worried about such cases? In listening to women who have had an abortion, he would understand what they had to undergo and experience to make this difficult decision to abort.

It is important to understand how a woman decides to end her pregnancy. It is not done lightly. It is, first and foremost, a painful experience. We should instead ensure that these women have access to the best possible services so that they can make the best possible decisions and rely on quality care during this extremely difficult time.

Private Members' Business

Psychological equilibrium is another important element when we are talking about women's health. This does not seem to be an issue or a concern for the member. It must also be possible to provide a safe environment once an abortion has been performed. When this environment is provided, there are fewer negative psychological consequences. Several studies attest to this.

Earlier, the member for Yorkton—Melville said he had read a 120-page book explaining all the risks of having an abortion. There is no question that there are certain risks involved in having an abortion. But I too have read studies. I have read other studies indicating that the risk to a woman's health or life is less than 1%.

When people claim that abortion has serious consequences for women's health, here again I believe they are mistaken. As I was saying, very rarely are there complications following an abortion. In most cases, these are quickly resolved. If the member for Yorkton—Melville did some research, he would find studies that support this claim.

In any event, I would like to thank the Table de concertation de Laval en condition féminine for sending us a lot to think about with respect to this issue. Perhaps the member for Yorkton—Melville should also read this type of document since it includes a great deal of research and analyses on this issue.

Addressing the issue of women's health with respect to having an abortion versus continuing the pregnancy, is an attempt to sidetrack the debate.

• (1820)

Only after a lengthy battle did women attain the freedom of choice as far as motherhood is concerned.

I would remind hon. members that the Canadian law of 1869, which made abortions illegal, never stopped women from having backroom abortions. That was the time their health was at risk. There was a health risk then, but is there one now? The context is different.

In 1966, this was the main reason for hospitalization. That gives some food for thought. Banning something does not stop it from happening. The figures speak for themselves.

In 1999, in Latin American and African countries where abortion is illegal, 95% to 99% of abortions are backroom abortions. That is the situation, and we would not like to go back to square one.

I would like to relate a personal story, that of my late mother. In the 1950s, she had difficult deliveries and suffered one miscarriage after another. When she got pregnant, she asked for authorization of the Church—which was necessary in the Fifties—to have an abortion, because her health was at risk. It was refused, and she was forced to continue the pregnancy. She miscarried at six or seven months.

Another time, when she got pregnant again, authorization was again refused—we are talking about therapeutic abortions, still the Church did not condone them—and her health was at risk. It was also out of the question that she have her tubes tied. We will not return to the climate of those days when women could not have access to medical care and had to let nature take its course.

The number of abortions did not increase. There are deaths from abortions performed in unsanitary conditions, and that concerns me. For any woman, an abortion is not a trivial matter. I think that we need to seriously realize under what circumstances women make such a choice. It is an extremely difficult one. I have known young women who have had to make that choice and I can tell you that it was not easy for them.

I hope that sufficient support is provided to women in the process of making a decision so that they can make the best possible one. When we look at our society—I think of the Canadian Alliance which often talks about reducing the social safety net—young women who, for all sorts of reasons, including poverty and psychological disability, ask for an abortion often face a difficult choice.

When we consider women's health, we know that abortions do not cause complications and that the risks are minimal. When an hon. member says he is worried about women's health, I think he should look at the statistics on female mortality.

An hon. member: Psychological health

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: There is psychological health as well as physical health. Mortality rates are higher among women who carry a pregnancy to full term.

If we look at women who have completed full-term pregnancies under difficult circumstances, we realize that this affects such women's psychological health.

Consequently, we must not give in to the prevailing wind blowing from the right in the United States where 31 states have put legal limits on abortions. They want to limit not only abortion, but also women's right to control their own bodies.

Today, I believe that young people make the decision as a couple; the decision to end a pregnancy is often made by the couple, together.

• (1825)

Even the Catholic Church refuses women the right to an abortion if they have been raped. That is completely inhuman. What does it mean to give birth to a child? We cannot hide our heads in the sand; we must look at the context this is happening in today.

I hope that the House of Commons, its members, both men and women, will vote against this bill, because it aims to recriminalize—

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Québec, but her time is up.

The hon. member for Saint John.

[*English*]

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for Yorkton—Melville for the motion he has put forward. He is a great friend of Canadian families and I thank him for that.

The purpose of the motion is to separate fact from fiction in the debate over publicly funded abortion. This is an issue that is very topical and of great interest to the people of New Brunswick because, as hon. members will know, Dr. Henry Morgentaler has sued our provincial government over its refusal to use public funds for private abortion clinics.

All Dr. Morgentaler cares about is the money he puts in the bank. He does not care about the baby in the womb. He does not care about the person who is having the abortion. I wish to congratulate our premier and our provincial government for not paying for these abortions.

The member for Yorkton—Melville has courageously gone to great lengths to show that the government has adopted a position that is without factual basis. In my hometown newspaper, the *Saint John Telegraph Journal*, the federal Minister of Health was quoted as saying:

Our view is that obviously abortion is a medically necessary service and therefore has to be insured, whether it is performed in a hospital or a private clinic.

That is a truly shocking position. In all my years working with the parliamentary pro-life caucus and all my time working in support of pro-life causes never before have I heard the argument that abortions were medically necessary. Heart transplants and blood transfusions are medically necessary, but abortions are not.

In fact, even those who believe that abortions should be allowed in Canada identify themselves as being pro-choice because even they acknowledge that abortions are an elective procedure.

As this House knows, I strongly believe that abortion should not be allowed in Canada. As a mother, a grandmother, and a member of Parliament, I do not believe that Canadians should have the choice to end a life that has just begun. It is a human life they are taking.

That is not what we are here to debate tonight. I want to respect the very clear wording and meaning of the motion. The wording of the motion and the spirit of what we are debating tonight is to ask the Standing Committee on Health to conduct a full and thorough study of abortions to determine if they are in any way medically necessary.

Are they medically necessary to maintain the health of Canadians? Are they medically necessary to prevent any unknown disease? Are they medically necessary to diagnose or treat any kind of injury, illness or disability? In short, are abortions medically necessary in any way, as the Minister of Health has suggested?

I am not a doctor, nor am I a nurse. I do not have formal training in any field of medical science. I am not in a position to answer any of those questions with any degree of expertise.

The Canadian Physicians for Life wrote to the Prime Minister on October 7, 2002, stating:

Women's health is being harmed by abortion, without their knowledge or consent. Available studies make this clear and the politics of abortion is keeping this information from women - they are not fully informed before they make their choice for abortion.

The Canadian Nurses for Life wrote a letter to each one of us dated November 18, 2002, clearly stating that abortion was not a medical necessity. The Canadian Nurses for Life went on to say:

Private Members' Business

As members of the most populous health care profession, we are well aware of the necessity of conserving our health care dollars. We are there on the front lines of health care twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We are uniquely involved in every aspect of caring for our patients and as such are able to distinguish the need for medical information when we see it.

They are saying that this is not needed.

● (1830)

The Minister of Health's own department has not conducted the kind of investigation necessary to answer the questions. The simple truth is that the minister does not have a single shred of evidence to support her comments. Why then would she say it? She said it because it was the only thing she could say to support the argument that abortions in private clinics should be paid for with tax dollars.

She said it because it was the only thing she could say that could justify the bullying of provincial governments like New Brunswick which has refused to do so. Provinces will continue to refuse to do so. They will go to court if they have to, but just because it was said does not mean that it was true.

I would hope and expect that the Minister of Health would support this motion. If she truly believes that abortions are a medically necessary service, then I challenge the minister to help us prove it.

Let us get the science in our hands first. Let us get answers to the questions first. I know in my heart that abortions are not medically necessary services and I am willing to put my opinion up to the scrutiny of the Standing Committee on Health. Why would the minister not do the same?

After all, is her opinion not the basis for government policy? Does she not owe it to Canadians to ensure that the foundations of government policy are deeply rooted in fact and not fiction? It was stated in the *Ottawa Citizen* that:

But when a healthy pregnancy is abruptly terminated, the hormones have too little chance to mature the breast tissue, so what is left behind is an increased number of vulnerable cells, which raises the risk of cancers developing.

This is right here in the paper that abortions can cause breast cancer. Our Canadian health care system is under ever-increasing strain as our population ages and as we combat new diseases. Health care dollars are at a premium and the provinces are already forced to make difficult decisions about how best to use those dollars to help Canadians. These decisions should be based on the best information medical science can offer us. The guidance we give as members of Parliament or as a minister of the Crown should be based on a logical view of the facts.

Recommending that the Standing Committee on Health investigate this matter is a search for the truth. It is the prudent and responsible course when faced with a shortage of information and a variety of opinions.

I do not believe that there is anyone here in the House of Commons who would take the life of an unborn child. That is a baby after 14 days.

On an issue where we should be doing everything we can, this is the very least we can do. We need to get our information. We need to get our research. We need the minister to ensure that the committee on health does its homework on this issue.

Private Members' Business

I wish to congratulate my member for Yorkton—Melville for what he has done and what he has brought forward here tonight. I wish to thank him very much.

• (1835)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 15th anniversary of the decriminalization of abortion.

This is cause for celebration. Today we ought to be celebrating that achievement and paying tribute to the women who struggled long and hard for recognition, and the right to be able to make decisions about their own bodies. We should be paying tribute to people like Henry Morgentaler who was an integral part of that struggle and in the forefront of leading this movement that recognizes fundamental choice for women.

What I do not understand is how members like the member for Saint John and the member for Yorkton—Melville can stand up in the House day in and day out and talk about the need for choice, choice on every issue except when it comes to women. They talk about choice in terms of guns, that is fine. But they say that women should not have the right to choose what is best for them and their families when it comes to giving birth or reproductive matters.

I do not mind debate and there are divisions, yes, but one would think that a motion put to the House would have a shred of evidence backing up its argument. It ought to have a basis in fact. It ought to have some statistical information. It ought to be rational in its approach. Well, today, we are dealing with an irrational motion. It has no basis in fact. It is based on innuendo, rumour, hearsay, and it is founded on a patronizing attitude toward women in our society today.

If we are going to pay tribute today, let us go back to the woman in the House who played a critical role in the whole struggle to decriminalize abortion. I want to pay tribute to Grace MacInnis, the member for Vancouver—Kingsway, who had the audacity and courage to stand up in the House long before it was popular and lay it on the line in terms of a woman's right to choose.

I want to put on record her words during that debate in 1967. What she said then about some other members in the House applies today. She said:

One feature of this debate which has alarmed, saddened and...made me feel very indignant, is the attitude toward women which has been displayed by some honourable members. It is quite an unconscious attitude; I am not saying it is deliberate. It is an inborn, uneducated attitude, an unconscious attitude on the part of many people in this country toward women.

They have treated women purely as baby machines, without minds, feelings or rights of their own. They have suggested that it is the duty of women to have any number of children without complaint.

They have suggested that therapeutic abortion boards should include a psychiatrist for the purpose of telling women that maternity under any circumstances is good for them. They have suggested that spiritual advisors be appointed to therapeutic abortion boards for the same purpose.

Let me conclude with one more quote:

Members of this house have argued that pregnancy reduces even an intelligent woman to a state of mindlessness where she needs a man to tell her what is good for her, and that, of course, she must continue her pregnancy regardless of the effect upon her and her child or society.

We thought that attitude, described so well by Grace MacInnis, was long gone in the House. Well, I am afraid, it is still alive and well in this House. We should put this issue to rest once and for all and say that there is no going back to the pre-1967 days. There is no going back to the days of backroom butchers. If members want to talk about health concerns, I would suggest they do some investigation about the impact on women's health if we go back to the days where in fact we treated abortion as a criminal activity and women were forced to resort to backroom butchers.

I suggest members read some of the evidence in a book entitled, *No Choice: Canadian Women Tell Their Stories of Illegal Abortion*. I suggest they look at the facts where we are reminded in the book that contraception and abortion were illegal in Canada until 1969, and that an estimated 4,000 to 6,000 women died from unlawful abortions between 1926 and 1947.

• (1840)

The book goes on to talk about the kind of desperation women faced and the way in which they had to turn to self-induced abortion or rely on strangers who were more often motivated by money than by concern for the women involved. Do we want to go back to those days? Absolutely not. Of course we do not want to go back.

Today let us put our minds to the problems at hand. If we are talking about health concerns, then let us look at the fact that women who resort to non-clinical therapeutic abortion services end up with serious health concerns. Let us remember the facts from numerous organizations since this nonsense has been appearing in the media about health risks because of abortions. The Canadian Cancer Society said:

We monitor information about potential risk factors for breast cancer, as it is a major health concern for Canadian women. Scientific evidence does not support the relationship between abortion and breast cancer.

I could go on and read quotes from the American Cancer Society, from numerous experts in the field, from people who make statements based on fact, not on rumour and innuendo. That is critical today.

Let us also look at this, if we are looking at the issue of access under the Canada Health Act and coverage under medicare, which the member is suggesting should not happen. The member for Saint John feels it is outrageous that women should be accessing therapeutic health services under a universally accessible health care system. If we are to open that issue, then let us look at the fact that we as a country have not yet achieved universal access for women in every part of this country, regardless of income and regardless of where they live, to therapeutic abortion services, to reproductive health services.

Time and time again we hear from women, other than the member for Saint John, about what it is like to live in New Brunswick, where there is no access to clinically approved abortion services, where women have to look at leaving their families, going huge distances, resorting to unacceptable alternatives, and living with fear and desperation and anxiety.

Private Members' Business

If we are going to address the issue of access, let us address the fact that to this day the government has not lived up to its promise to ensure that women are able to access our health care system the same way men can: for medically necessary reasons on the basis of the expert advice of their doctors and in consultation with their families.

Surely we do not need to hear from members suggesting that those individuals with children are somehow special because they did not have an abortion. We heard women in this House today asking what woman relishes the idea of an abortion. That is not what we are talking about. We are talking about extraordinary circumstances where women are forced to look at abortion because of an unwanted pregnancy. We have to look at the cost to our society of not ensuring that women are provided with the full range of services.

We have made a lot of progress in this country since the days of backroom butchers. We have made a lot of progress since abortion was decriminalized. But we have a long way to go to ensure that every province in this country offers women services when they need them. We have a long way to go to ensure that the full range of supports are there for women who find themselves in very difficult circumstances.

Under no circumstances should we forget that our work must continue, which we have really in many ways only just begun. For goodness' sake, above all else, let us not go back. Let us not go back, as the Alliance and the member for Saint John would have us go back, to the days when women were treated as baby machines, when women were not given the right to choose, when women had to resort to precarious alternatives that were detrimental to their health. Let us remember that women have the right to choose their own destiny. Let us reject this motion. Let us defeat Motion No. 83.

• (1845)

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I see that the debate has become quite an emotional one this evening. I will remind anyone tuning in that the debate is actually about whether the health committee should examine whether abortion is medically necessary. It is a very appropriate question in a day when we have scant health resources and a lot of money is being spent on something that a lot of people do not appreciate their tax money being spent on.

Whether it is medically necessary or not becomes an important question. We might say it is a question of science. The member for Winnipeg North Centre and I had a lot of discussions about scientific issues when I was a member of the health committee. There are a lot of issues we might agree on, but when she says tonight that there is no basis in fact or in science for assertions that an embryo is a human being, I think she is very misguided.

I will begin with a quote that came out of the breakfast meeting held at the end of last week. We call these meetings the bacon and eggheads breakfasts around here. It was a science debate. A fisheries expert, Dr. Hutchings, made the presentation. The doctor quoted Gro Harlem Brundtland, the former PM of Norway, who stated that politics that ignores science "will not stand the test of time".

We hear emotional debates about a woman's right to choose, but we also hear debates which ignore that what is in the womb is a pre-born human being from the moment of conception. That is the science behind it and it really is not debatable.

The member for Mississauga South who spoke a little bit earlier tonight quoted Françoise Baylis, a noted Canadian ethicist and professor whom we have had at the health committee, who said that from the point of view of science a human embryo is a member of the human family from the point of conception. This really is not an issue that is up for discussion as far as science is concerned.

I would like to say that this whole concept of human conception has been degraded sadly in the debate and in this whole argument about choice. It is the marvel of human existence and of human procreation, the marvel that brought each one of us into this room, dare I say, as there may be the odd one who has come here some other way, and I know there are many members who question which planet they come from.

I would like to quote an ancient Hebrew proverb: "There are...four things too wonderful for me: the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock; the way of a ship upon the seas; and the way of a man with a maid".

There is a marvel in our origins that has been sadly negated and under-appreciated in our day. The marvel of human conception, if we could talk about the facts for just a moment since other things have been flying around here, is that from the moment those sperm take their epic journey in their voyage down that fallopian tube and encounter that ovum that has also been ready and waiting and gently floating its way down that fallopian tube, if the timing is right, from the moment of encounter there is a rapid change that takes place at that ovum. It is like an iron curtain drops that prevents another sperm from penetrating that ovum.

Within 24 hours, the chromosomes have paired. That is 24 hours and at that point we have a new human being which has a different genetic makeup from the mother and from the father. We have a new human being. Some 30 to 36 hours after conception, the first cell divides into two cells and cleavage continues until by the fourth day there are 16 cells. At this stage, science says it is called a zygote. It moves along the fallopian tube toward the uterus. By the time of the first seven days of life the young human being sinks into the nutrient wall of the uterus where she implants herself.

At the end of two weeks a primitive streak appears. The member for Mississauga South has mentioned this earlier. The primitive streak is the beginning of the nervous system; that distinguishes the different germ layers of the individual. Over the next three weeks, these layers give rise to specialized tissue and organ systems. So by the time the woman has realized she is pregnant, we have a human being with a nervous system.

• (1850)

Women's safety has been mentioned. One of my colleagues was attacked for raising the concerns about women's health. We are concerned about women's health and we ought to be because there are some very disturbing consequences to women as a consequence of abortion.

I go way back to 1978, just a few years after the famous, or infamous, Roe v. Wade decision in the United States. In 1978 the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the Better Government Association conducted an investigation to determine whether women having clinical abortions were receiving safe, competent care.

Private Members' Business

Working undercover in six clinics, their representatives witnessed in four out of six clinics, for the record: haphazard, unsterile and illegal medical procedures and conditions; incompetent and unqualified doctors; abortions performed on women who were not pregnant; massive infections; severe internal damage, some so severe that all reproductive organs had to be removed; two-minute abortions when the average usually is 10 to 15 minutes elsewhere; some doctors were in such a hurry they did not wait for pain killing medications to take hold; failure to order critical post-operative pathological tests; dangerous, shoddy record keeping; counsellors who were paid not to counsel but to sell abortions; and deceived, maimed or crippled women. There were at least 12 deaths in the Illinois clinics and abortions were performed on girls who were as young as 10 years. There is a multimillion dollar business in abortion.

There is a lot of deception going on, but I would like to say that women have been victimized by this. That list relates to issues that happened right at the time of the abortion, but I would say that the psychological trauma goes on for a long time.

Interestingly enough, in the October issue of *Vogue* magazine there is an article "Roe No More Politics". Norma McCorvey is the name of the woman who was in the Roe v. Wade case. It was her case that brought this whole issue to the courts in the United States. She has since changed her mind. She is now campaigning to see the abortion laws changed in the United States because she realizes she was a victim. She was not given informed consent. She was told lies and misconceptions about what was really going on in the womb.

Dr. Bernard Nathanson, one of the leading proponents of abortion in that era, himself responsible for tens of thousands of abortions, has now changed sides in this perspective and has accepted the scientific view. There is a lot of deception and debate about science. We need to be honest about this. This is an issue that needs to be examined. I recommend that the health committee do due duty and diligence with this motion and that the committee be given the opportunity to examine this issue.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking all members who spoke in support of Motion No. 83. For those members of Parliament who oppose the motion, I really only have to wonder why they would be afraid to examine the health issues surrounding abortion. I ask them to please read the motion carefully before voting.

Why should Parliament not fully examine and document all the health risks for women having abortions? Why should all women not have this information before they take a chance on an unwanted pregnancy? Why should all pregnant women not have the best information available as part of making their choice to have an abortion or not.

Without first studying the medical necessity of abortion and the risks associated with having an abortion, we will never be able to provide women with the best information available in making what surely will be one of the most important decisions of their lives. Certainly it is the most important decision for the life of the baby inside them.

I would also like to thank the 10,679 Canadians who signed petitions supporting Motion No. 83. It is indeed gratifying to know

that so many people agree with the motion being debated in the House today, and voted on in the House tomorrow.

We have heard statistics quoted by speakers on both sides of the debate on my motion. What are Canadians supposed to make of this often contradictory evidence? Are Canadians supposed to believe the statistics that reflect their own particular point of view on a woman's right to choose or a baby's right to life? It is up to Parliament to provide leadership on important moral issues. It is our job as members of the House of Commons to provide the best information to our constituents on all issues, but especially issues involving life and death, rights and freedoms and right and wrong.

Parliament should not leave the truth about the medical necessity of abortion or the risks of having an abortion as a multiple choice question for women, but that is what we have done in the last 12 years. For 12 years, MPs have abdicated their responsibility to provide all the facts about abortion to Canadians, and especially to women. It is time for us to stop ducking the issue. Canadian women should be able to come to government for the truth about all risks associated with every medically necessary service provided by our state health care system. Right now they cannot.

A vote in support of Motion No. 83 is the first step in correcting this 12 year oversight by Parliament. The health minister and her officials have admitted that they do not have any evidence in their files to show that abortions are medically necessary. We should all be asking why not. If the Department of Health does not collect this information, is it not incumbent on Parliament to do the studies the government will not undertake? Even Dr. Henry Morgentaler agrees that abortions get riskier for the mother as the pregnancy progresses.

On September 19 the *Hamilton Spectator* reported Russian health officials saying the following:

Artificial termination of pregnancy after week 12 is fraught with grave consequences for a woman's health. Abortions account for 30 per cent of maternal mortality in Russia. It has been decided to reduce these dangers.

All I ask with Motion No. 83 is for Parliament to determine what the risk is for Canadian women. In a recent column that appeared in a number of CanWest papers, Lorne Gunter reported:

Of the 40 or so major studies on the ABC (abortion-breast cancer) link, nearly three-quarters have shown a statistically significant correlation.

In response to Mr. Gunter's column, the *Vancouver Sun* published a letter on September 10 from two doctors and the program director of the B.C. Women's Hospital citing one study that did not find a correlation. Based on this one study the doctors reassured women having abortions that, "they have not put their future health in jeopardy".

Somewhere in these studies is the truth. What is it? It is time to replace emotional arguments on both sides of the abortion debate with sound science. For the sake of the health and safety of all women, this needs to be done.

Doctors take an oath to do no harm. I believe the government should take the same oath. Governments should be held to the same standard that we hold individuals and corporations, that is that we are all responsible for our actions and damages they cause. If medical procedures are proving to be causing harm, then precautions have to be taken. If medical procedures cause more harm than good, then we have to be even more careful how we deliver and insure these services under the Canada Health Act.

It is the government's solemn duty to do no harm. I urge all members to vote in support of women's health and safety.

•(1855)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:58 p.m., the time provided for the debate has expired. Is the house ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Private Members' Business

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, October 1 at the beginning of private members' business.

[*Translation*]

It being 7 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7 p.m.)

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