



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 139 • NUMBER 004 • 3rd SESSION • 37th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 5, 2004

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

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

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 5, 2004

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

RADIOCOMMUNICATION ACT

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (for the Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-2, an act to amend the Radiocommunication Act.

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

* * *

• (1005)

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. David Price (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association. This is the report of the official delegation which represented Canada at the conference, "Securing Peace: NATO's Role in Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution", which took place in Brussels on October 16, 2003.

I am also presenting the report on the visit to Canada by the President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly on October 27 and 28, 2003.

[*English*]

Ms. Sarmite Bulte (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34 I have the honour to present to the House a report from the Canadian branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association concerning the 49th CPA conference which was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh from October 4 to October 12, 2003.

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-472, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (deductibility of fines).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to introduce for first reading today this bill which calls for an amendment to the Income Tax Act to put an end to what I believe is an outrageous situation where fines, penalties and levies can be written off income tax by businesses as legitimate business expenses.

I believe that the public is shocked at this situation. Parliament should act because the Supreme Court directed in fact that if Parliament does not intend to allow fines to be business deductions, then Parliament should clarify the Income Tax Act to put an end to this situation.

By the same logic no one should benefit from a wrongdoing and it undermines the deterrent value of a fine if a business can write it off as a legitimate business expense.

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

The Speaker: When shall the bill be read the second time? At the next sitting of the House subject to the Chair reviewing this bill. I have reason to suspect this bill is in the same form as one introduced in the previous session that was ruled out of order. I will be reviewing the matter with that caveat in mind and may get back to the House at a later date. There may be representations with respect to the matter also once it has been printed.

* * *

PETITIONS

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of the people in the Peterborough area. They are concerned about kidney disease and problems associated with kidney disease. They point out that this is a huge and growing problem in Canada. They know that real progress has been made in dealing with various aspects in preventing kidney disease, in curing kidney disease and coping with kidney disease. They know that the Canadian Institutes of Health Research has done a good job in this matter.

However, they call upon Parliament to encourage the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to explicitly include kidney research as one of the institutes in its system to be named the institute of kidney and urinary tract diseases.

The Address

●(1010)

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 it is my privilege to present to the House a petition signed by 27 constituents dealing with the benefits of stem cell research in the fight against juvenile diabetes.

The petitioners wish to draw to the attention of the House that scientists have demonstrated that the growth factors of embryo stem cells can be harnessed to develop into insulin-producing cells that might help to cure juvenile diabetes.

The petitioners pray and request that Parliament support the use of all types of stem cells to help provide a cure for Type 1 diabetes.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present two petitions on behalf of my constituents today. One is requesting Parliament to immediately hold a review and a debate on the definition of marriage and reaffirm as it did in 1999 its commitment to take the necessary steps to preserve marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): The second petition deals with child pornography. It calls on Parliament to protect our children by taking all necessary steps to ensure that the materials which promote or glorify pedophilia or sado-masochistic activities involving children be outlawed.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition on child pornography. The petitioners condemn the use of child pornography, as it is condemned by the majority of Canadians. The courts have not applied the current child pornography law in a way that makes it clear that the exploitation of children will always be met with swift punishment.

Therefore, they call upon Parliament to protect our children by taking all the necessary steps to ensure that materials that promote or glorify pedophilia, sado-masochism involving children are outlawed.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Roger Gallaway (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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from February 4 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, and of the amendment.

Mr. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the chance to comment on the Speech from the Throne that was delivered by the Governor General on February 2.

This is an exciting time, with a new government and a new leader. The throne speech charts the directions that our government will be taking over the next while. It sets some of the priorities and goals. It is important to know that the members on this side of the chamber and those in what we call the rump played an active role in developing and working on this throne speech.

I was very pleased to see a number of initiatives mentioned in the throne speech, and they will be some of the priorities of our government moving forward. In particular, I was happy to see that the new deal for municipalities is a real deal for municipalities. There were many skeptics who doubted our government's will to work with the cities, municipalities and communities to find a better way to provide sustainable funding and a funding for some key priorities with which Canadians identify.

Beginning February 1, there will a 100% GST rebate for municipalities. This will be a down payment while the government works with the provinces and municipalities to share with them a portion of gas tax revenues, or other mechanisms that may be deemed more appropriate by provinces and municipalities, as the federal government begins to work with them on that point.

This GST rebate is 100%, as I said. Over 10 years this effectively will amount to a \$7 billion transfer to municipalities. For the city of Toronto, for example, this equates to some \$50 million a year. This \$50 million a year can be put to uses like public transit. It can be used to help with the development of affordable housing. It can be used to fight crime.

We have far too much violent crime in my neighbourhood, crime that is motivated by drugs and gangs. I know Chief Fantino has expressed concerns about his ability to deal with these matters. With these transfers to the municipalities, this will provide the city councillors some scope to start addressing some of these very serious problems such as the proliferation of handguns and the western-style shootouts that happen in my riding. Gangs arrive and start shooting at each other with handguns while innocent people are nearby and could easily be injured. We have to put a stop to that, and this money will start us on the way toward that.

As we work with the municipalities on ways to transfer the gas tax, this will be the next phase as the government's fiscal position becomes more clear and more certain and when the government has more flexibility in the next few years ahead.

The Address

We need to involve the provinces in these discussions. One thing we do not want to happen is the provinces clawing back this money from the municipalities. We have seen this before. Our government transfers money to the provinces for the CHST, for health, post-secondary education and social programs. The the Ontario government, under the former administration, then used some of that money to cut taxes. We all want to cut taxes, but we have to also step up to our responsibilities.

I do not want the province of Ontario scooping back this money that we will be giving directly to municipalities. We have seen it also with the national child benefit which went to many citizens in Ontario. The Government of Ontario clawed it back. We cannot have that happening again. We want to make sure this is new money is for municipalities, and I am sure our government is committed to do that.

Another key priority in the Speech from the Throne was a recommitment to our health care system and the follow-up and implementation of a further \$2 billion in funding for the provinces for this fiscal year. We have to work on a sustainable health care system. We have an aging population. We have new technologies. The pressures on health care spending are enormous.

That is why this health council will attempt to build information so that citizens in every province can compare what kind of value for money they get out of their health care dollars. They will be able see what the waiting lists are for a surgery, for emergency rooms in their various provinces, and how that stacks up with the performance of other provinces. If their province is not meeting an acceptable standard, then they can then demand that it deal with the issue.

•(1015)

By the way, Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for York Centre.

The throne speech includes the creation of a new Canada public health agency. A new Canada public health agency will provide a much more coordinated approach to public health issues and threats. Right now we have a number of different organizations, agencies, bodies and people across a wide spectrum. This will bring people together. It will bring the experts and programs together under one roof so we can deal very effectively with SARS and with new threats like the avian flu if it should appear on our shores. That is a very important step in the area of public health.

More quality child care, more quickly will happen as indicated in the throne speech. That means more child care spaces more quickly, and for many citizens in my riding this is a very important matter. I have had many constituents talk to me about the importance of home care and child care. This would provide them with that relief.

Our government recommitted itself to fiscal prudence with no deficits. We will not spend our way into deficit, that is for sure. We will continue our track of reducing the debt in relation to the size of our economy. We started out many years ago at 71% debt to GDP. We are now at about 44% and we will get down to about 25% in the very near future.

To do that, we will be reviewing all expenditures to make sure that they align with the priorities of the government and priorities of

Canadians, so we are getting good value for all our dollars and spending is being managed well.

The throne speech talked about investments in people, updating and improving grants and loans, to increase access for middle and low income families to deal with the rising cost of education. This is a big issue in Etobicoke North.

Registered education savings plans will be broadened or new incentives created to make it more attractive to low income Canadians so that they can save early on for the education of their children. There also will be more programs to support and encourage skills upgrading as the economy changes and evolves so rapidly.

The ability to live, breathe and walk about in a clean environment is absolutely critical. We have environmental problems in the city of Toronto. We have environmental challenges with air that is not as clean as it should be. Our government has said that we need an equitable national plan to implement the Kyoto accord. There is no point in setting goals unless we can achieve them. We need a plan that describes very clearly what the risks and benefits are, how this will be paid for and how we will accomplish these objectives in very real terms.

The government has committed \$3.5 billion also over 10 years to clean up contaminated sites for which the federal government is responsible, and an additional \$500 million for remediation of other sites. We have many brownfield sites in my riding of Etobicoke North, and I hope that some of that money can be redirected so we do not have to start new greenfield operations. We can build on the existing infrastructure and halt the spread of the urban sprawl.

The government is also intensifying its commitment to clean air and clean water by focusing on transboundary issues with the United States. There is also the one tonne challenge. Every citizen is going to be challenged to reduce emissions by 1,000 kilograms per person per year.

We are going to build on the investments in science and innovation, in basic research, which amounts to about \$13 billion since 1997. We are now at the phase where we need to get that technology transferred and diffused into the economy. We need more commercialization so this innovation can be translated into jobs and economic growth as well, and benefit all Canadians.

We need to ensure that research and expertise is available to small businesses so that they can develop on their own.

The Address

The democratic deficit is mentioned also in the throne speech where parliamentarians like those in this chamber will be called upon to more fully participate in the decisions of the government. There will be more free votes. There will be a review by parliamentarians of appointments. When courts are making such important decisions, it is very important that parliamentarians know a bit about these people and what they stand for. I am looking forward to participating in that.

There will be the creation of an independent ethics commissioner.

On the international stage, there will be a review of foreign policy. I hope that includes a foreign policy review in respect to Somalia. I have many Somalia Canadians in my riding, and Somalia is a failed state. They are trying to put it on the right path, and I hope that can happen.

• (1020)

There are new capital investments in defence and also affordable AIDS and HIV drugs for African nations.

These are very positive initiatives. It is an ambitious agenda. I hope the members of the House fully support it, get behind it and support the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was an interesting speech by the member for Etobicoke North. To hear him talk, one would think that like his leader, the new Prime Minister, the speech is all things to all people. Certainly in some respects it tried to do that.

He started out his remarks by bragging about the role of all Liberal members, including backbenchers—and he actually even referred to the members of Parliament from what he referred to as the rump—having input into the throne speech. Yet last night we saw a very important and I would say critical debate in this chamber about BSE and the mad cow crisis that is affecting not only western Canada but indeed the entire country.

My first question to the member for Etobicoke North is, how is it that with 170 members of Parliament all providing this input into this throne speech no one found it important enough to have the BSE mad cow crisis mentioned at all, let alone an action plan laid out in the throne speech or at least outlined so that beef producers could take some heart?

The second thing he referred to which I want to ask him about is his use of the term, quite derogatorily I might add, of western style shootouts in Toronto. We all understand they have a very serious criminal firearm problem in Toronto. I wonder if this has caused him to rethink his support for the failed gun registry and if those millions of dollars that continue to be spent or wasted on this gun registry would not be better spent putting more police officers on the streets in Toronto.

• (1025)

Mr. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, the member for Prince George—Peace River really has his sights set very low. The intent of a throne speech is to talk about broad directions for the government. BSE is very much a priority for the government. In fact, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the minister before him have worked very hard on this, working with the agricultural sector, travelling to Japan and Washington. This is not an easy problem. This is a very

serious issue for farmers across Canada and is something that we have to work on.

The government is working on it, but I do not think there is any plan that could be articulated in a throne speech. The plan is to work with the various stakeholders to try to convince the international community that our beef is safe. That is what our minister is doing and that is what our government is doing. I applaud them for doing that.

With respect to gun control, in my riding I have gone to division 23, the local police, and asked whether gun control was useful to them. They say they get a lot of information from that registry and it is helpful to them, although it is not the panacea. So as long as the police tell me that, while yes, we need to improve the operation of that system and the gun registry, because we have built a house that cost too much that is no reason to burn down the house.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question to my hon. colleague is about how in the entire throne speech there was not one mention of the crisis we are facing in our forestry industry and in softwood lumber. It is a huge crisis right across the country, affecting every province, yet in the throne speech there was not a mention of it.

Part two of my question is about page 17 under “Regional and Rural Development”. There is talk about Canada's energy resources and maximizing the potential of coastal and offshore areas in a new oceans plan. Many fishermen and their families are very concerned about what exactly that means. Are we going to exploit the inshore areas, for example, off British Columbia and off the east coast of Canada, on oil and gas reserves and possibly do tremendous damage to those fragile fish stocks? This is the type of question that these fishermen would like to have answered today, if at all possible.

Mr. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, for the member for Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, I find it ironic that both members opposite, or certainly the member for Prince George—Peace River, talked about how everything but the kitchen sink was in the throne speech, and then they want something about BSE, they want something about offshore drilling, and they want something about softwood lumber.

Softwood lumber is a very serious problem as well but what our government is doing is what has to be done. We are working with the stakeholders and we are trying to find solutions. This is not a simple problem. In fact on Tuesday I will have a motion, Motion No. 397, which talks about the need to come up with a different approach to countervailing duties and subsidies, but this is not something that will be accomplished easily, if ever. I hope it can be accomplished but it will not be accomplished easily.

We have situations now where the U.S. is implementing agricultural subsidies in huge amounts. They are implementing state and local government subsidies for manufacturing facilities in, for example, the auto industry. At the same time they turn around and tell us that we are unfairly subsidizing our softwood lumber industry. This is totally and patently—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I am sorry to interrupt. Resuming debate, the hon. member for York Centre.

The Address

Hon. Art Eggleton (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in addressing the Speech from the Throne I want to focus my time on the new deal for cities, or “new deal for communities” as it is fashioned in the speech.

I have three reasons for doing that. First, my riding of York Centre is located at the geographical centre of Toronto and when I go door to door and visit with my constituents I hear a lot more about high property taxes and complaints about inadequacies in municipal services than I do about federal problems.

Second, I bring a perspective as a former mayor of Toronto for some 11 years, and the issues of the financial squeeze that cities are facing is something that I personally understand.

Third, I am chair of the GTA caucus, which is a caucus of some 40 Liberal members of Parliament who represent a population of almost five million people in an urban situation.

The Speech from the Throne is outlining what I would see as the beginning of an urban strategy, and it is a needed urban strategy. It is something I have advocated for a long period of time. After all, 80% of the people of this country live in urban areas. The engines of our economy are urban areas. They are very important parts of the cultural mosaic of this country, so we need to have an urban strategy, just as we need a rural strategy, for dealing across departments on a horizontal level with the various issues we face.

In this throne speech we see GST relief for municipalities. That is a good thing. It puts money very quickly back into the hands of the municipalities. In my case, in the City of Toronto it is some \$52 million. Also important is the fact that some \$20 million will go to the benefit of the Toronto Transit Commission, the TTC, which it needs badly to help cover its deficit situation in terms of the provision of public transit.

The GST relief is a measure that has been applauded by municipal leaders. It may not be the opposition applauding, but certainly we have heard from the mayor of Toronto, the mayor of Winnipeg and the mayors of a whole lot of other cities who are unanimously and very vocally in favour of what has been provided in this Speech from the Throne. It was a very specific measure that was announced.

Second, there was the acceleration of infrastructure last year in the budget. We, for the first time, went to a lengthy period of time: 10 years for an infrastructure program. That is good, because what the municipalities want is some predictability. They want to know that over a long period of time they can plan and rely upon that money coming in. It is good that in the infrastructure program we lever provincial money and we lever municipal money. That helps add to the pot to do more to help strengthen our infrastructure and stop the deterioration of our infrastructure in our urban areas.

So now we are talking about accelerating, and we need to accelerate because we need to get more money in subsequent budgets. The infrastructure program, which I was pleased to have been able to start for the federal government when I was minister of the Treasury Board back in 1993-94, I think is a solid program of great need for urban areas right across the country.

Third, the throne speech says that city hall will get a place at the table and I think that is vital as well. There are three orders of

government, maybe only two of them officially in the Constitution, but to the citizens out there who are the taxpayers for all three levels of government they are all important and we need to have the perspective of our municipal leaders at the table.

I can remember that back in the mid-1970s when I first became a municipal politician we had things called tri-level meetings, that is, federal-provincial-municipal. Those were great days in terms of dialogue and cooperation. There was even an urban affairs ministry of the federal government. I think we can get back to a table that does have three orders of government planning together. I think we could see agreements between those three orders of government that would help make our cities, our urban areas, more liveable places in continuing to contribute to the economic and cultural vitality of our country.

I think the throne speech is a solid, welcome piece of work.

• (1030)

As next steps, there are other urban issues and other aspects of the new deal that need to be examined. In Toronto, for example, we are in a crisis situation on two big issues, urban transit and affordable housing. In many other urban areas across the country those two issues are significant. However, overall, all municipalities are facing infrastructure problems.

Let me highlight the two problems because I think they are important. We cannot leave these problems to the municipalities. We cannot expect that the GST relief will cover these areas. There is a lot more that needs to be done. We need to be a partner with them. All three levels of government need to be partners in dealing with issues such as urban transit and affordable housing.

The problem of urban transit in Toronto results in the city suffering from gridlock. The board of trade says that we are losing \$2 billion a year in our economy because of this gridlock. Part of the answer to that is to get people on public transit. However in the last few years we have been making it more difficult for people to get on public transit. There have been cutbacks in service and in maintenance, and higher fares.

The Toronto Transit Commission receives less government support than any major transit system in the world. It receives 20% support from the provincial government at this point in time. It was getting 50% support and 75% for capital. It receives a lot less but receives some support from the provincial government.

If we were to look at some of the major transit systems in the United States we would see that they get federal support as well. In fact, their total government support far exceeds what ours is, even in other parts of Canada. For example, in Montreal I think we would find 30% or 40% government support versus the 20% support that exists in Toronto.

The Address

Therefore the province needs to do more and the federal government needs to do more in terms of urban transit if we are to solve this gridlock problem. We have to solve it if we want to keep our cities viable and keep them as the economic engines of our country. Toronto, like a lot of the other cities, is very important to the coffers of the government as well.

I will now turn to affordable housing. This is a very sad situation. We need a housing strategy in this country. We need a federally led housing strategy with a partnership with the other levels of government as well. We need to deal with the problem of homelessness and the problems that seniors face.

In Toronto we have some 70,000 people on a waiting list for housing geared to income. Those people are being told they will have to wait seven or eight years. That is unacceptable. These are people who are spending 50% or 60% of their income in some cases on rent. They do not have enough money to make ends meet. In fact, they have to go to food banks. We have over 6,000 children who live in homeless shelters. We have seniors, even though there is indexing in their pensions and it is geared to the cost of living, the CPI, whereas rents in Toronto have been increasing twice as fast as that particular rate has. Therefore, they are into a squeeze as well.

I have had seniors in York Centre tell me that they are paying 50%, 60% or more of their income on housing. Again, that is a terrible situation in which to put our seniors. A lot of people are suffering as a result of this housing crisis.

We need a housing strategy. We need to get on with developing affordable housing with the other levels of government and we need to do it now in both of these cases because we are in a crisis situation.

The throne speech clearly says that in the new deal this is a down payment. That is welcome terminology because it means that there is a lot more to be done. I know the Prime Minister and his parliamentary secretary have a long list of things they want to do. We have talked about the gas tax, and that is certainly one item that I think can go a long way toward helping meet the transportation costs in our municipalities, whether it is roads or urban transit. Urban transit, certainly in the greater Toronto area, needs the major amount of focus.

Yes, the throne speech is a good down payment and a good start but there is more to do. I am glad we are heading down the road of an urban strategy. I congratulate the Prime Minister and the cabinet for helping move us in that direction in this throne speech.

• (1035)

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, looking through the throne speech, listening to it carefully, and having been here for 10 years and having heard other throne speeches, it appears to me that about 90% of the throne speech is what I would call reruns. The hon. member who just spoke addressed one of those rerun items and that is poverty. One of the new ideas in the throne speech is the GST rebate to cities.

I have two questions I would like to ask the member with regard to both of those items.

I know how much the government loves money and how it hates to lose revenue. It has demonstrated that ever since I have been here. The government will lose some revenue by giving back the GST to cities. I was wondering if the government would be reducing the transfer payments to provinces to make up for the loss of the GST.

Why, when in 1993 one million children were declared to be living in poverty and the government declared a war on it and indicated it would be wiped out by 2000, is it that in 2004 we now have 1.5 million children living in poverty? It looks to me like a dismal failure on the part of the government.

• (1040)

Hon. Art Eggleton: Mr. Speaker, this is a novel throne speech in terms of cities because there has never been this kind of mention of cities before. In the case of the GST, there has been nothing quite as specific as that in terms of the instant benefit that will go back to our cities. Let us give some credit where credit is due in terms of something that is quite new.

Giving our cities and municipalities a place at the table is also vital toward solving problems, including poverty. Yes, I think we should all hang our heads in shame about poverty. However over the years the government has put a lot of attention on poverty, particularly for children. The child tax benefit and the entire child care program that is now evolving are all designed to help meet the needs of our poorer families and to meet the needs of our future generation of Canadian citizens and voters, our children.

A lot of progress has been made. A lot of good things have been done but, yes, there is still a lot to do. Every member of the House, of all political parties, decided that poverty should be eradicated. We all should hang our heads in shame because we still have that kind of problem.

The government has been dedicated over the last 10 years and continues to be dedicated to doing what it can to cut down on poverty and give people in this country an equal opportunity.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague's remarks, in which he raised the issue of municipalities. In my opinion, however, the most important thing in the throne speech is what is missing.

As we look at the whole world today, an unusual phenomenon can be seen: China is about to become the world's factory. Canada has also opened its textile import markets to southern countries. It has even gone ahead of international agreements on this matter.

But there is not one word in the throne speech concerning what the Government of Canada is going to do to face these realities. Is this not a major oversight by the federal government, which is not capable of attacking the problem, finding a solution and proposing tangible action? In fact, our entire manufacturing sector is disappearing because of this new reality.

The Address

[English]

Hon. Art Eggleton: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier in my remarks, cities, where 80% of our population lives, are the economic engines of this country. Cities find themselves in the situation where they are competing more and more with other cities of the world. Toronto competes, not with cities within Canada, but with some of the major cities in other countries, whether they be in the United States, South America, Europe or wherever.

What we are attempting to do here with the new deal is recognize that. We are attempting to bolster our cities' opportunities to continue providing those economic benefits to our entire population. It is like the goose that laid the golden egg. We want to continue to nurture that goose so it can continue to do that for the benefit of all Canadians and advance our economic endeavours worldwide.

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege and a pleasure to respond to the Speech from the Throne on behalf of the people of my riding of Yellowhead and as Conservative Party senior critic of health as well as intergovernmental affairs.

We really have to ask ourselves a question before starting out. We have to get a sense of where the throne speech is going because it is a document that looks into the future. We have to first talk about where we are at in health care today. We then have to talk about how we got there and where we are going, as laid out in the throne speech.

I would like to point out, as aggressively as I possibly can, the dysfunctionality of the throne speech in moving us forward into the 21st century in this area. Where are we in health care today? That is a question we all need to ask ourselves, because any day we pick up a paper we find massive problems in health care. We find waiting lists becoming extreme to the point where over a million people are on waiting lists right now waiting for serious surgeries and operations for problems they have. Many of them are dying while on these waiting lists before they can even get to the system that we cherish so much in Canada, this cherished health care system.

We have patients dying in emergency rooms. Hon. members should see the turmoil in Nanaimo, B.C. or Saskatchewan where we have doctors actually mutinying. We have never seen this before in the history of this country. When we talk about health care in Canada, we have never seen so much disunity, but more than that, people hitting the end of the rope and saying that enough is enough and they cannot handle it any more.

I saw the Minister of Health the night before last on television saying that there were no waiting lists in this country, that if people have an emergency problem they will be looked after. He should tell that to the lady who had a miscarriage while waiting over five hours in an emergency room. He should have said that to individuals before they died of heart attacks while on waiting lists or in emergency rooms. These are cases that are not just specific. These things are happening right across this nation as we speak today. They have to be addressed. We have to look at where we are going in health care.

To understand some of the difficulties and how we got here, we also have to look at the human resources problem, the shortage of doctors and nurses. It is interesting that my colleague, who is a doctor, spoke, in response to the Speech from the Throne, about his training. While he was training, another individual, who was an

immigrant, was also being trained. That individual came up to the standard of the United States qualifications and was to go back to the United States, although he was trained here. We would not accept him with those same training qualifications here. There is something wrong when we have such dire shortages that we have individuals dying in this country and we are not opening our arms to these highly trained individuals from other countries. We have to do something about the human resources problem. There are two fundamental problems: the waiting lists and human resources. I will talk more about those things shortly.

We had the SARS outbreak that told us an awful lot about what was happening in this country and how we lacked in preparedness for these kinds of situations. We also have looming on the horizon a potential influenza virus. It is to be hoped that will not mutate into human to human contact, but we are watching that with great interest because it could become so serious it would make the SARS outbreak hardly worth mentioning. Nonetheless, are we prepared? Are we ready? What lessons have we learned?

The federal-provincial strained relationship is something I am also very concerned about because of what has happened in the past on health care. Never before have we seen such a situation as we have in health care today in Canada.

How did we get here? That is a pretty good question. Let us look at the legacy of the Prime Minister. He says that health care is a number one priority of this country. That is what the Prime Minister is saying. Yet I wonder if that is true when we really look at what he has done in the past. If we want to know where an individual is going, we only have to look at where he has been. That will tell us where he is about to go. We have seen from the Prime Minister in the past the massive unilateral cuts in 1995. When we talk of unilateral cuts, these are not cuts where we sit down and negotiate and then decide that this is in the best interest of everybody before we cut. These were unilateral cuts, cuts that came just because one individual said that he wanted to balance the budget, and it was on the back of health care.

• (1045)

It is really interesting when we look at the numbers and the priorities. We say maybe at that time the finance minister had no options. Maybe he had to do something with a deficit budget, which he did. It is all about priorities and obviously health care was not one of those priorities, \$25 billion. It is unbelievable.

At that same time it is interesting to note that subsidies to businesses rose \$700 million or 20%. At that same time the increase in bureaucracy spending was \$1.3 billion or another 6% added to the additional budgets.

That was not at the same time that health care was put on back bench. Health care was exploited. That destroyed the fifty-fifty arrangement we had with the provinces with regard to health care. That was something that had been cherished for a number of decades as medicare came into being in the provincial-federal relationship as a national project.

The Address

That was destroyed by the unilateral cuts. It destroyed the relationship of the provincial and federal governments. Worse than that, it drove nurses and doctors out of our training institutions because they closed down those training slots and anyone who was working in the system had to go for employment south of the border. Our brightest and best were driven out of this nation.

At that time the country's medical and nursing associations said that in 10 years we would pay a price. Well, here we are, 10 years later and we are paying that price. We do not have the human resources to deal with the problems. What are we going to do about it?

Let us look at our health care system. It is amazing that every time we talk about the health care system in an intellectual dialogue about health care, everyone thinks that the American system is coming. That is absolutely false. There is not a provincial government or a party in this House that is advocating the American system.

In fact, the Americans rated 37th in the world as far as how good their health system is. We should not be bragging much either because ours rates 30th. We should be looking at who are the 29 above us and what can we learn from them to develop the health care system in the 21st century that will meet the needs of Canadians. That is where we need to go.

It is amazing when we look at the Speech from the Throne. We see now what we have. We talked about how we got here. Are we looking ahead? Is the throne speech truly a window into the future as to where the government and the Prime Minister want to take this country as far as health care is concerned? It does sort of look ahead but it does not look back or talk about the past and the failures because it is not a very pretty picture at all. The Prime Minister is the cause, not the cure, for many of the problems we are dealing with in health care.

The throne speech is long on generalities and recycles many old pledges but it is very short on any specifics. There are some specific failures. It failed to mention last year's health accord. It was the first time that we had the provincial and federal governments sit down, hammer out a deal and agree upon it. We could debate whether they got everything they wanted, but they agreed with it. We should be saying there is an agreement and let us at least achieve what both levels of government agreed upon at that time. There is no mention of the failures in the throne speech on that front at all.

There is also a failure to outline a timetable for the creation of a Canadian public health agency. We saw what went on with SARS. We know the potential pandemic that will come some day. All we have is supposedly the appointment of a chief medical officer. I will talk more about that later.

There is also a failure to include the pledges for stable, long term funding for health care. It is really interesting. Why would that be? We may say that the throne speech does not do that sort of thing but that is not true. That is exactly what was announced for the cities. In fact, it was retroactive from the throne speech. Yet looking ahead, health care is not getting any stable funding.

I have to mention the stable funding. I challenge the government to stop playing the numbers game with the provinces. In 2000, just before going into an election by the way, the Liberals announced \$21

billion to go into health care, but not a nickel of that money, which is the foundational money that goes into health care, went in until April of the next year. Then it was a five year allotment of money after that period of time.

• (1050)

Then the Liberals came out in 2003, when three years were still left in the original agreement of 2000, and reannounced that same money. They ran around the country saying that they were putting another \$34.8 billion into health care.

Why would the provinces sit there and not believe the government? They know the numbers are wrong and they know that old numbers have been reannounced. They know that the government is just playing politics with the numbers. I challenge the government not to play politics with the numbers. That may work for the average citizen out there, but it does not work with the relationship with the provinces which have the mandate to deliver on health care. It just destroys their credibility.

That is what has been done with the \$2 billion that was announced in the throne speech. There is not a government in the land, certainly not a Prime Minister that is going into an election, that would not have announced that \$2 billion. It would have been political suicide if he did not. Why play coy for the last month on whether that \$2 billion was going to be announced this month or not? How ridiculous that would be. There was not a reporter in the country, not a party in the country, not a person in the other party who believed that that \$2 billion was not going to go in, so why play this game? It destroys credibility. Credibility is absolutely paramount if we are going to work together in the 21st century on health care.

It is very important that we understand some of the things that should have been talked about in the throne speech but were not. They should have been talked about in the first ministers meeting on the Friday before the throne speech, the failures of the health accord.

If we look at the health accord, there are a lot of things that are good, that reflect some of the views we have and are agreed upon by most people in the House. Those are restoring funding to the core health services, the flexibility of provinces to implement those new services, the flexibility of delivering the options of a new public health care system, and the dedicated health transfers which is to stop the nonsense about what money goes where, to clear that up. All of those things were agreed upon in the health accord. We agreed with those.

The Address

There were a lot of things that were agreed upon in the health accord and were not accomplished in the last year. There was supposed to be a minimum basket of services for home care. There was a date in the accord and that had to be accomplished by September last year. Also in September last year, the health services performance indicators were not there at all. They have not taken place to date. It was promised that they would be looked after by last September. Also, the health council was supposed to take place last May and did not actually happen until December. Why would that happen? Even when it was in December and the health council was announced, there were two provinces saying that it was not what they had agreed to at the health accord.

When the government sat down and met with the provinces again, which happened last Friday with the Prime Minister, we would think that the first thing on the agenda would not have been the \$2 billion but would have been the issues that were not dealt with which both sides had agreed to just the year before. None of those were even talked about.

There was no talk of the aboriginal health reporting framework which was supposed to be talked about. There was the catastrophic drug coverage for all Canadians. In fact when the minister was asked about that here in November, she said, and this is a quote, "The work there really at this point has not begun". That is what she said and that is actually the truth.

The reality is that money alone will not save our health care system in the 21st century. What we have to realize is that we have to get serious about dealing with the problems on health care, stop the bickering in the relationship between the provincial and federal governments and those things that destroy the trust. We have to start working on putting the interests of the patient ahead of the system as we move forward in the 21st century. That is what has to happen. That is not what happened when it came to the health accord.

One of the things that should also have happened, and the first thing that should have been in the health accord in looking at the Prime Minister's legacy, is that he should have written in the throne speech "I am sorry" as the first thing he said about health care and apologize to the nation for the way he has treated health care and put us in the state we are in. Then he should have moved forward with a vision of how we are going to fix that situation.

That is not what happened. We should have put a sixth principle into the Canada Health Act which we fought for in the last election so that never again could a Prime Minister unilaterally destroy this nation's number one priority, which is health care.

●(1055)

Do we believe the Prime Minister when he stands and says that health care is his number one priority? I think we really have to question where we have been, where we are at and where we are going in light of those words. I really have some serious concerns about where that should be.

Let us talk about the public health agency that was announced.

Look at the failure of SARS, and I say the failure of SARS because we were absolutely not prepared. When tragedy strikes our nation, whether it is militarily or an infection in a pandemic situation, or a health threat of any kind, we absolutely have to have leadership.

It has to come from the leaders who are charged with that leadership in the House. It has to come from the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister of the day. That was not the case when SARS hit the nation.

Do we need a CDC north, an infectious disease centre as in the United States? Perhaps we do. Perhaps we already have that and it is just not coordinated. I think that is more likely the truth. Now we have a new ministry that is charged with that but the government actually was warned by the Auditor General as well as the deputy minister of health who said that we are vulnerable to this kind of an attack in Canada and that we have to do something about it.

The alarm bells went off over the last decade and we failed to deal with it. It is unfortunate that we see what the throne speech had to say about that. It said that we are going to appoint a chief public health officer but there is no timeline on the agency. There is no budget for it. We do not really know if we are prepared today.

Let us say that the bird flu which is in Asia right now happens to move to human to human contact, to mutate to that degree. Are we prepared? Absolutely not. Should we be prepared? Absolutely we should and we should be working a lot harder and more aggressively toward preparing ourselves for that.

That is not in the throne speech. We would have thought there would have been a timeline and a budget for it. Neither is the case. All we are doing is playing politics.

Mark my words. The chief officer will be appointed before the next election. It will appear to Canadians that everything is looked after and nothing will have happened except the hiring of one person who is going to run to the media and communicate how well the government is supposedly doing in case something happens. That is what will happen and it is unfortunate.

We do not need this game of politics when it comes to health care. We cannot afford it. We do not have the time and we do not have the money.

Another thing that should have been in the throne speech but was not there was a bill that the House has been working on very aggressively for the last three years. It is Bill C-13. We need a bill that deals with the threat that is there. Doctors are actually saying that they are going to clone the human being in the next year. We need that legislation but not the Bill C-13 that was so flawed. It had flaws on surrogacy, on gamete donor anonymity, on research using the human embryo and a host of other things, including no accountability for the agency that was going to be set up, the in vitro fertilization clinics and authorization of what should or should not be allowed under the legislation.

The Address

We said originally what we need. We would split the bill in half, bring forward a bill that would allow the prohibitions that everyone in the House would agree to, which is therapeutic reproductive cloning, germ line alteration, chimera and a host the others. They are all named in the bill. That would pass in a blink of an eye. We could pass that this month. We could pass that next week if it was brought forward. That is what we should be doing and that is not what happened. In fact there was not even a word of it in the throne speech.

Another thing that really bothers me in the throne speech is that it was a golden opportunity for the Prime Minister to right his wrongs in the past on the hepatitis C file. There is \$700 million left in the court agreement to look after those who contracted hepatitis C through blood transfusions through absolutely no fault of their own. The government is liable for this. It arbitrarily chose the period 1986-90 which is false and it knows it. Many of the members on the other side of the House know that every member on this side of the House knows it full well. The money is there but the will is not.

What a golden opportunity for the Prime Minister to correct his wrongs and to do the right thing and to compensate everyone who should have been compensated for the wrongs of the country. As a Canadian I feel badly that the government of my country is not looking after its wrongs.

The other thing that bothers me is when it comes to natural food products and the ability for individuals to choose how they look after their bodies and how they have alternative medicines. There was absolutely nothing on that.

• (1100)

A colleague of mine, the member for Nanaimo—Alberni, has brought forward a private member's bill, Bill C-420. We should have had some commitment in the throne speech from the government to allow freedom of choice in that area, something on natural food products.

I would like to conclude by saying that the throne speech was very deficient. We have a health care system that is in dire straits. We all know how it got that way. I just described it.

Where are we going to go from here? Number one, we have to put the patient first and build a system around the patient in the 21st century. We have to get the relationships right between the provinces and the federal government and agree upon our mandates equally so that we can do what is in the best interests of Canadians.

• (1105)

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech. I have in front of me the bulletin of the National Advisory Council on Aging. I will quote from it. It talks about what is abuse for seniors. It lists neglect as:

failing to meet the needs of an older adult unable to meet those needs alone.
Denial of food, water, medication, treatment, health aids, nursing services, clothing, visitors.

Yesterday the minister who is responsible for senior citizens in this country said in the House that our seniors are doing very well. A former minister of the government this morning said that he is

hearing from seniors in the city of Toronto how hard it is and what a struggle they are having.

Seniors right across Canada are struggling. I would like to ask my hon. colleague if he is hearing that in his riding. What is his position is on the health services for the seniors in his riding?

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely paramount that we understand the dynamics of what we are heading into in health care. Seniors do not really start consuming health care resources in a dramatic way until the age of 65. That is when our bodies naturally start to break down and we start consuming much more of the health care dollar. From 65 to 75 it doubles from about \$5,000 a year to over \$7,000 a year. From 75 to 85 it doubles again to over \$14,000 or \$15,000. These are two year old figures, so it would be much more than that now.

On top of that, we think the number one issue for Canadians is health care, but when we talk to seniors it is the only issue. If they do not have health, they do not have much. They understand that very well. They do not talk about their bank accounts. They do not talk about their work. They talk about their health. On health, the seniors in this country are very fearful of what is actually happening. We have to start looking after them.

Another thing about seniors that we found in our cross-Canada study on the addiction to prescription medication was just how poorly seniors are being treated in some homes. Some of the problems they are having with breaking a hip, breaking ankles and so on, are not so much because of osteoporosis, which is a serious problem, but because of the addiction to prescription medication that is happening within some of our homes. Some of the statistics were absolutely alarming. The number of deaths a year is from 10,000 to 20,000 because of adverse reactions within our facilities. I have heard individuals who appeared as witnesses before committee say that we are treating our seniors so poorly that all we are doing is sedating them into death.

We have to really be careful as a nation with what we do for our seniors. We have to respect their needs, understand their needs and prepare for what is coming down the road. It is something that I do not believe we are ready for as a nation.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for raising a number of very relevant points regarding shortcomings in the Speech from the Throne. I would like to raise something with him and ask for his views.

Many of the aspects he raises have a price tag to them, yet the government is willingly forgoing hundreds of millions of dollars in possible revenue. I would like to ask his views on this point. Is the hon. member aware that businesses can deduct fines as a legitimate tax deduction from their income tax? I think most Canadians would find this absurd, but in actual fact breaking the law can offer a dividend and a reward. Surely most Canadians, as I said, would find this horrifying.

The Address

Would the hon. member agree with me that the government should not let another tax season go by allowing businesses to deduct fines from their income taxes as per the 1999 Supreme Court ruling which opened the door to this? If I could remind the member as well, the United States has specifically enacted legislation to disallow the deduction of any fine or similar penalty paid to the government for the violation of any law.

• (1110)

Mr. Rob Merrifield: It is an interesting question, and I will respond to it, but it really has nothing to do with health care. Nonetheless, it is interesting. I do not believe anyone should be allowed to deduct fines. I do not believe that individuals who are put into our institutions because they have broken the law should have the ability to vote either. I think they have waived that right.

If we are going to exempt something, we should be doing it more on the educational side. The Prime Minister said that health care and education were his number one and number two priorities. It is interesting that it says in the throne speech people can deduct a computer but not textbooks from their income tax. There is something wrong when that is happening. I have had all kinds of students from universities saying this is ridiculous and they should be able to exempt their textbooks. That would be a much smarter thing than exempting fines.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by acknowledging your service in the House of Commons for the last 16 years.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Dennis Mills: We came to the House together in 1988 as colleagues. With only 33 days of House time left before a national election, I will reminisce on some of the great relationships you have had in the House on both sides and also on some of the accomplishments that we have been able to make happen as a result of our working together as a team. I know on behalf of your constituents that you have always been there for them and they will miss you.

It is a great privilege to be elected to this chamber. As we are heading toward an election, we begin to appreciate a little more what a trust we have been afforded by our constituents. Really, trust is the central issue here. Trust is what it is all about.

What has always made this chamber special for me is that we come here not only to talk about issues pertaining to our own ridings, but we are here on behalf of our ridings to speak about national issues.

In other words, if a member only wants to come here and talk about issues pertaining to his or her own riding, one might as well stay a city politician or a provincial politician. What makes us different here is that we have a responsibility to speak about national issues from our base wherever we are, whether we are a rural member or a city member. I consider that to be quite a satisfying experience.

I want to deal a little bit with the issue of trust today, because one of the challenges that we have had in our community in downtown Toronto has to do with the Government of Canada presence in our community. Most of the media action in this country is centred in

Toronto. On a regular basis we are fighting to try to communicate the government message. We are competing against global issues.

Quite frankly, it is a heck of a challenge to communicate all the good things that the Government of Canada does in a community such as ours in the Greater Toronto Area. In fact, about two and a half years ago, the largest paper in our community, a paper called the *Toronto Star*, wrote an editorial. The heading of the editorial was that Toronto MPs were “missing in action”. The editorial went on to say how the Toronto MPs really do very little on behalf of their constituents.

I was troubled by that editorial; we were all troubled. I decided to come back and sit down with the researchers in the Library of Parliament and ask them what is the exact state of the number of treasury dollars that go into the Greater Toronto Area. The researchers came back to me a week later and, to my astonishment, they illustrated that for all taxes received from the Greater Toronto Area, all taxes, whether that be GST, corporate taxes, excise taxes, or personal income taxes, the treasury of Ottawa receives approximately \$32.5 billion.

• (1115)

The Government of Canada has sent back to the greater Toronto area \$22.5 billion, every year for the last 10 years. That \$10 billion, the differential, is our contribution toward equalization, debt reduction, and so on. Quite frankly, I have never met a person in Toronto who resents the fact that we share the richness and the assets that we have with the rest of the country, or parts of the country that are not as advantaged as we are.

So the fact that we ship \$10 billion more to Ottawa than we receive back is not an issue. However, the real issue and the real doubt, when I explain this to some of my constituents, is where does all the money go? It does not seem like the Government of Canada presence in the GTA is \$22.5 billion. The Government of Canada activity does not seem like \$22.5 billion.

I then proceeded to go department by department, government agency to government agency and ask, what are the dollars they are spending in the GTA? It took a couple of years, but I am happy to report to the House today that I am close to completing the breakdown of where that money goes.

In fact, I have all but nine departments or agencies of government reporting. We are still missing Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation does not want to tell me how much money is spent in Toronto, but we all know that the head office of the CBC is there. We all know that it employs about 3,500 people. So we can calculate that there is approximately \$300 million of the \$1 billion we give the CBC going into the GTA.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission has not reported yet. We are still waiting for the departments of Foreign Affairs, Finance and Fisheries and Oceans. I still have not heard from Health Canada and we can imagine that that is quite a large number in the GTA.

The Address

Transport Canada is going to get back to me very soon because it has just made additional commitments in the GTA and it is not quite sure if all those commitments are going through. It wanted to ensure that the number was solid. In other words, there is some doubt over a large amount of money from Transport Canada, but its number will be here very soon.

The point is that I have a list of \$15.5 billion that goes into the greater Toronto area. I am happy to share this with every member of the House. If anyone wants to go to my website and punch the button, they can access it.

Mr. Joe Comartin: It is not much more than Windsor.

Mr. Dennis Mills: It is absolutely more than any region of the country.

However, we must remember the fact that this is the economic engine of the country, and I say that humbly. We do not mind that there is another \$10 billion that is shared with the rest of the country. If we keep that economic engine healthy, we will continue to throw off much more than we receive. As national politicians, it is our responsibility to share with the rest of the country.

I want to go through a few examples of some of the agencies of the Government of Canada that actually spend tens of millions of dollars in the GTA. Even the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency spends money in Toronto in substantial areas. So does the Canada Industrial Relations Board, the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and all of the agencies of government.

• (1120)

The point that I want to make has to deal with responsible government. As elected members of Parliament, it is important to know where every dollar goes in our communities. It is not right that we are unaware of the dollars that go into our communities.

I know for a fact that three years ago we gave about \$20 million to chartered banks for a program called labour adjustment. Not a single member of Parliament would vote for money going to banks that are making large sums of money when there are other needs for children, housing, shelters or whatever. This is the point that I want to make. It is about responsible government as well.

From time to time we have to look at government expenditures and ensure that they are meeting the priorities of the House of Commons. It is important for members of Parliament to know what is going on in their communities because they might need to cut in a certain area because there may be a greater need for people in pain. The point that I am trying to make here is that our system of government should be designed and managed in a way where we can ensure that those dollars are being spent wisely.

The second point that I want to make has to do with the communication of this large sum of money, or any sum of government money in whatever riding in this country. One of the reasons there is tension right now, whether it be provincial or municipal, is because there is a lack of understanding as to what government departments and agencies do in their communities.

It is incumbent on all of our public servants in whatever department or agency of government to ensure that they are doing their work on behalf of Parliament and communicate in a constructive way with the region or the community so that there is no misunderstanding with the media, no misunderstanding with the general public, about the activity of the House of Commons and how that work is executed.

I lay that down as a foundation for the fact that when we talk about a new executive, a new Prime Minister, a new government, it is important that when we look at this Speech from the Throne and see the commitments that are being made to municipalities, that we see that these commitments are on top of an already existing foundation of federal presence. This foundation is something we should not forget. We should ensure that when we are interacting with municipalities and working with their needs, that we also bring to the table the other work that we are already doing.

If we are going to create some momentum over the next few months around this focus on communities, cities, hamlets, we are only going to do that if the collaboration respects and understands the existing presence of the Government of Canada.

In other words, we cannot get into a discussion on new moneys or new commitments without acknowledging the foundation that is already there. One of my greatest fears is that people will isolate the new commitments from that foundation of, in our particular case, the \$22.5 billion that has already been spent in the greater Toronto area.

This morning, on a radio show in Toronto, the new leader of the NDP said that this Speech from the Throne represented crumbs to the greater Toronto area and that people will eventually wake up and find that the Government of Canada does very little in our community.

• (1125)

That is really not constructive. What we have to do is, and I hope my colleagues in the greater Toronto caucus will support this idea, appeal to the Public Service of Canada, who is already spending that \$22.5 billion, that we show that because it is \$22.5 billion plus what is being committed in the Speech from the Throne and probably, in the not to distant future, the budget.

I want to leave with this House today the fact that we are moving into a new season. I have enjoyed the time that I have had in this House over the last 16 years. We hope that in the next election we continue to win the trust of our community.

Having said that, I will never forget the reason why I came here in 1988. It was because of the debating skills of John Turner on free trade. I enjoyed three special moments with Jean Chrétien, specifically, his commitment to Kyoto, his commitment to say, "No, we are not going to war with Iraq", and for me, the work that he did on the clarity bill was something very special that this House will one day recognize as being a special moment in this House.

I want to say that my hope for our new Prime Minister, the new leader, is that he will become our first green Prime Minister, with a commitment to the environment.

The Address

I am also hoping that our Prime Minister never forgets that the people who make \$15 an hour or less are the heart and soul of this country and all our policy should be designed in a way that all those people are in the loop, respected, and that they are listened to.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member from Toronto. I appreciate his enthusiasm for his city. He reflects on the needs of his city and on what the future holds.

Certainly, when he relates to how much will be spent through government programs in his city, it is a significant amount of federal tax dollars, not to say there is not a need for much of what he is saying. There probably is. What disturbs me a little about the whole presentation is that Toronto is not the centre of the universe. Toronto is not the only large city with specific needs.

I will go back to my own City of Calgary and even take a step beyond into Vancouver. The very things that the member describes about the needs of Toronto, the City of Calgary also faces. The City of Calgary has a major problem with the Trans-Canada highway and very few federal dollars have gone into fixing that major problem, where heavy truck traffic goes right downtown through that city.

I am going to ask the member, since he is so stuck on Toronto, what does he know about the City of Calgary, its needs, and how will the federal government fix those problems, besides the \$19 million that is allotted through GST rebate which will not even build one interchange?

• (1130)

Mr. Dennis Mills: Mr. Speaker, it is a great point and I tried to acknowledge that point in my initial remarks.

As members on that side will acknowledge, when there were specific needs for the farmers of this country we in Toronto tried to press the nerve of the government to spring additional dollars forward. We acknowledged the fact that the Trans-Canada Highway needs more infrastructure support. In no way, shape or form am I begrudging any federal presence in the province of Alberta. I would continue to be in favour of doing things that support every region, especially those regions and provinces that are not advantaged provinces.

I am not going to differ with the member. That is part of the reason I said that all of us as members of Parliament should know where all the federal dollars are going in all of our own communities. I do not know the total number of federal dollars that are going into the province of Alberta, but I would make the point to the member that there may be federal dollars going into his province that he may disagree with and may think should be re-profiled for the Trans-Canada Highway. That is my point. I think that re-profiling existing dollars is a very important exercise for all of us.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was interested to hear my colleague from the Liberals talking about the economic analysis he was doing department by department. I was wondering what assurances he could give us after the fiasco we have had around the Canada Steamship Lines assessment. Initially it was \$137,000 that it had contracted with the government. Then it was \$161 million. This week another \$21 million U.S. was discovered, which is about \$25 million or \$30 million Canadian.

I am wondering what assurances he can give to the members of his riding, the members of the House and the Canadian public that this economic analysis he is doing will be any better than what we had with regard to the CSL contract.

Mr. Dennis Mills: Mr. Speaker, I have worked with the NDP for the last four elections and I obviously will be jousting with it again in the next election. The one thing that I have always experienced in the last four elections with the NDP are the moments when one can get a bit into the zone, and I am not talking about this specific member, where it can be a bit nasty. Obviously a mistake was made in terms of the initial numbers and the mistake is being corrected.

I started off by using the word trust. I am happy to give the member of Parliament from the NDP all of these documents. I have received these documents from various departments in the Government of Canada and I trust that the officials who gave me these numbers submitted them to the best of their ability.

I have worked on the Hill now for 20 years and we have the best public service in the world. However, in every institution mistakes are made and, from time to time, they can be sensitive and embarrassing mistakes. On this side of the House and in this party we have always corrected them. I believe part of the reason we always come back here is because we always try to take the higher ground.

• (1135)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the speech by my colleague from across the way.

I want to say very briefly that we have all heard about vote splitting and I am looking forward to him splitting the vote between Jack Layton, the leader of the New Democratic Party, and the Conservative Party candidate coming up the middle and winning that riding for the Conservative Party.

Having said that, I want to take this opportunity to wish my hon. colleague well. I hope he wins second place and Jack Layton comes in a dismal third.

Mr. Dennis Mills: Mr. Speaker, Jack Layton and I are warriors from many moons ago. We have had a friendship for a long time. I taught in his classes at Ryerson. The one thing Jack and I agree on is the level of foreign investment in this country. I share his view that there is too much of it and so we will put that debate aside.

However I will tell the member the one area where Jack and I differ. I consider serving in this Parliament the greatest privilege I have had in my entire life. For the life of me, I cannot figure out why, in the last year and two months, the leader of the NDP has passed on five separate occasions, where he could have gone into almost an acclaimed environment, to be sitting in the House, respecting the House and asking questions here. I am not saying that day will not come for him, but to pass on it for 14 months is a mystery. I will leave it at that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Order, please. To my knowledge I have not seen the name of Jack Layton in the Speech from the Throne.

The Address

There is only a minute and a half left. The hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar.

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned agriculture in one of his statements. He recognized that people making under \$15 an hour are the people who basically keep this country growing.

Yesterday a farmer in my riding told me that to get into the new agricultural programs and try to get some money out of that, he would have to put 16% of his income down before he even started into these programs.

I would like the member's comments on that.

Mr. Dennis Mills: Mr. Speaker, for starters, that is shameful. One of the great challenges that we have in the House of Commons is the fact that our population base has shifted to a point where 80% of our nation is now living in larger communities, which essentially represents the structure of this House in terms of MPs.

I am a city MP but we worked together when we did the family farm tributes, one, two and three. The greatest communications challenge we have in the House of Commons is to sensitize urban members that the quality and the security of the food and the supply of food that is produced here is more of an urban issue than it is a rural issue.

Sensitivities, like somebody having to find 16% equity, does not make any sense to me. I would appeal to the new Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food because he is a pragmatic minister.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam. What a mouthful. Maybe he should have gone first. It is a lot easier to say Wild Rose .

It is a pleasure to speak to the throne speech today, a throne speech, I might add, while listening to the words coming over the microphone and trying to absorb as much as I could through the droning that went on, I thought was a rerun from 1993, 1997, 2000 and a few in between. Over and over it was the same kind of throne speech with a couple of things that might have been new. I think maybe 5% of the throne speech was something I had not heard before but about 90% or 95% of it was all old stuff that has been hashed and rehashed.

In my riding, a big farming district, I encouraged people to pay close attention to the throne speech when it was read. I asked the members of my farming communities to listen carefully because, with the crisis in the cattle industry and in the lumber industry, which have had an effect on my riding, surely the government would be making some announcements that might be interesting to them and that they might want to hear. I am sorry to say that after the throne speech was all over I was reminded of an old commercial "Where's the beef?" There was nothing there, nothing whatsoever.

It was a nice election platform and, of course, doing what anybody who would be running for prime minister of this country would do, the throne speech announced that a gift of \$2 billion will be given to the provinces for health care. That is something desperately needed, and what a great time to do it. There was a great deal of campaigning going on during the speech, and that is what it is, an election platform. It is not, in my opinion, a good delivery of the vision of the

nation at all. It does not address any vision at all. It talks about the same old things.

I spent a good portion of my tour here as a member of Parliament going across the country. I think you, Mr. Speaker, would probably well remember the years I spent going from Indian reserve to Indian reserve, visiting several hundreds of them, visiting with the grassroots natives in their homes and their huts. The hospitality of these people was just phenomenal. Back in the early to mid-1990s, up to about 1998, we did all this. I listened to the throne speech about how desperately necessary it was to do something. I have to say that I was amazed, when I looked at the throne speech on page 9, that the government dared make a statement in the House of Commons in the year 2004 stating:

The conditions in far too many aboriginal communities can only be described as shameful.

Good grief, that is what we heard in the 1993 speech and in 1997. All kinds of reports have been delivered to the House about the horrible conditions on these reserves. Even the United Nations has declared in the past that although Canada was elected to be the best country in the world in which to live, if we factored in the Indian reserves we would be about 35th. Where is the dedication to dealing with the problems that were old 10 years ago when I first came? I am sure there are members here who can assure me that these problems existed before that.

When the government stands in this place to deliver a throne speech saying something to the effect that there are one million children living in poverty in this country, that homelessness is overwhelming and that it will see that it is fixed, which was said in 1993, and 14 years later there is not a million starving children living in poverty, there are a million and a half. Is that progress? That is really moving. That is really successful.

• (1140)

What a wonderful government. It made these announcements years ago of what was to be accomplished and here we sit today with things worse than ever. Good grief, I hope the Canadian people realize that when this government talks about being committed to a cause what we should do is just put a period after committed. The government should be committed. That is an absolute, dismal failure. It is only one example.

It was boldly stated in 1993 how proud we are of our military forces. And boy, we are: the men and women in this country should be applauded forever for their efforts. But my goodness, what the forces have had to put up with in terms of looking after their needs and what is necessary to maintain a good, strong military unit: it is another dismal failure.

I hope the Canadian people across this country realize what failures these guys are. I forgot, though, that the government did one thing. It balanced the books. That is good; we wanted to get rid of the deficit. Never mind the fact that the government increased taxes so darn many times and so much on the backs of taxpayers and cut transfer payments to all the provinces so severely. The government takes it off the backs of the provinces and from hard-working Canadians and then boldly stands in this place and says, "What a bunch of heroes we are".

The Address

If Canadians cannot see all through that, I am really feeling sorry for this country. I really hope Canadians are paying attention to what is going on.

Let us talk a little more about children. If I have said it once in the past few years in the House of Commons, I have said it a hundred times: we have to start dealing seriously with issues that are affecting our children, particularly their safety.

My party has brought motions before the House, accepted by all members, saying that we should have a registry of sexual offenders and predators who prey upon our women and children across this country. What kind of registry did we get? Rifles and shotguns. This is a perfect example of going after law-abiding, hard-working Canadians and making sure they are doing their job. In 2004 we still do not have a national registry of these offenders who affect the security and the safety of our children. This is another dismal failure. Promises, promises: they do not mean a thing to the government.

I cannot tell members how disappointed I was to read page 8 of the throne speech when we in the House of Commons unanimously agreed that we should do everything to remove all defences for the possession of, manufacturing of and distribution of child pornography for exploiting our children. We all agreed on that.

What do we get? The government says it is once again committed to ensure the safety of children by bringing back and reinstating the child protection legislation. The government has not had any child protection legislation. What the government has done is make a commitment to this kind of thing, through unanimous support, including that of the government of the day, and it has failed to produce. What the government is going to do is rehash old legislation. The government is going to bring it back and we are going to go through all of that again.

With regard to child pornography issue in the Criminal Code, possession except for medical or educational purposes will not be allowed. I can buy that, but what happened? Over the time period of that case, it was decided in the courts that this little section must include the words "artistic merit". We had quite a thrash over that, but then the courts put it in. It has become part of the Criminal Code. We wanted it out. The government brings in legislation and put in "public good". The government is not getting the message. We want to abolish child pornography now and forever. We want it wiped off the face of the earth. We want to make every effort possible to do that.

Where is the commitment? Where are these people when the voice of the nation has spoken through their elected representatives and says that the people want legislation to abolish it?

•(1145)

I say, be committed for a change. I am committed to do my very best as long as I am in the House of Commons to wipe child pornography off the face of this earth. I am not going to allow nine unelected individuals sitting in a courtroom to determine whether we should or should not do that. I am going to allow the people of this country to have their voices heard. It is high time that the silent majority was heard in this land. It has been unheard for too many years and we are going to start bringing it back to life.

•(1150)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, page 17 of the throne speech indicates that the government is seriously thinking of developing Canada's energy resources in terms of using the coastal and offshore areas under a new "Oceans Action Plan".

Today in *Quorum*, the *Vancouver Sun* quotes B.C. energy minister Richard Neufeld as saying he believes this comment means that the federal government is about to lift the ban on offshore oil and gas drilling within very sensitive fishing grounds off British Columbia.

I would like to have the member, if it is possible, speak on the Conservative positions on inshore oil and gas exploration in very sensitive ecological waters and the fishing rights of fishermen in those coastal communities.

Mr. Myron Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I have not paid much attention to that particular area of the throne speech and to the activities taking place. I do have a lot of confidence in provincial jurisdiction in a lot of areas regarding natural resources. I think the government would be wise to back off on some of these issues, leave it to the provinces and let them work with the industries and decide what must be done. I have no further comment at this time.

Right now I am thinking about those things that should have been taken care of a long time ago in the House of Commons and I am asking why they are being rehashed again and again.

Hon. Paul Bonwick (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development (Student Loans), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech of my hon. colleague across the way. Certainly one listening to that could only take out of it that apparently there are a lot of villains on this side of the House: that we are not interested in Canada's future, we are not interested in supporting Canadian children, and we are not interested in making this country the best that it can be. Of course Canadians clearly recognize that as a lot of rhetoric and as something that they quite simply do not believe. It is the sour grapes mudslinging that party is famous for, whatever name they run under.

My question falls in two areas. First, the member talks about the number of tax increases that take place, yet it was only two years ago that the largest single tax decrease in Canadian history was announced by the former minister of finance, now our Prime Minister, to the tune of \$100 billion. I heard his party comment that we actually stole their tax reduction policy, so it was quite interesting. The opposition clearly felt that we had a very aggressive tax reduction policy and they felt we had just stolen their taxation policy. I am curious to hear the member comment on that.

The second point is this. If he is so interested in helping children, how in the world is it that his former party, the Alliance, the united alternative or whatever it was, voted against the increases the government brought forward for the child tax benefit program, the increases that provided the funding for families most in need? I am curious about that, if he would comment.

The Address

Mr. Myron Thompson: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we had in our platform a much better deal than what was offered by the government. We would have liked to have seen a better deal accepted rather than the one they offered.

We have to laugh an awful lot, because he talks about the \$100 billion in tax relief and what a wonderful thing it was.

Hon. Paul Bonwick: Child tax benefit. You're not answering the question.

Mr. Myron Thompson: He is awfully noisy. Maybe he should listen for a second.

Most of the people I know in my riding—the hard-working, tax-paying, pack a lunch and go to work every day kind of guys—never saw it on their paycheques. They never saw it once. Why? Because for every deduction that they have on their income tax, there are all kinds of increases in so many other areas that it is gone.

Those members say, “Oh no, EI is not a tax, it is an insurance program, how dare the member even talk about that”, and as for CPP, this has to be done, and as for the GST, on and on it goes. It is always replaced with something.

This is one thing that frightens me about taking the GST and giving it back to the cities. It worries me. Where is the money-hungry government going to get the money to replace that? Is it going to tax somebody else in another way to get that money back? It has illustrated over and over again that its desire to tax is a great deal higher than it admits.

• (1155)

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond in this debate on the Speech to the Throne, specifically in my role as the transport critic for the official opposition. I want to focus specifically on the new deal for cities that is much hyped, with very little delivered, in the throne speech.

In order to understand how this so-called new deal for cities is not very new, it is important to know just precisely how out of step this Liberal government here in Ottawa is, both with our neighbours and with all Canada's provinces, with regard to the spending of gas tax dollars. At the provincial level in Canada, on average 91.6% of all provincially collected fuel taxes is invested into transport related infrastructure projects. In the United States, 84% of federal gas taxes is earmarked specifically for highway and infrastructure improvements.

Ottawa, by contrast, puts fuel excise taxes into the consolidated revenue fund, general revenue, from which it is doled out for various government schemes and projects. We are talking about a huge sum of money. Last year, the federal government collected \$4.7 billion in federal gas taxes and, on top of the \$4.7 billion in gas taxes, \$2.2 billion in GST on the cost of fuel and a tax on the excise taxes themselves. That is a total of \$7 billion every single year, or roughly \$220 for every man, woman and child in Canada, that is collected at the pump in gas taxes.

If we were to ask the average citizen standing at the gas pump for \$220, he or she might want to ask what that money would be going for. In any of the provinces and in the United States, the answer is

that the money is used to improve infrastructure and roads in those jurisdictions. However, a Liberal politician would be forced to say that the money goes into the general revenue piggy bank and is spent on other projects, such as the billion dollar, useless gun registry, \$161 million in corporate welfare to the current Prime Minister and his company, Canada Steamship Lines, and billions of dollars in corporate welfare, and a mere \$4 to \$22 is spent on roads and infrastructure respectively.

What the Liberal politician would not tell the motorist but what every Canadian knows is that the closer we get to an election call, the more money Liberals like to spend on roads. According to the throne speech and clarified by the Prime Minister's response to it, I understand that as of February 1, 2004, the GST paid by municipalities will be credited back to them. Rebate cheques are due to start flowing in time for the upcoming federal election. The amount of the rebate is expected to be about \$580 million every single year or at the rate of about \$48 million every month as an election is just about to be called.

That \$48 million must be seen in perspective. In all of 2001-02 Ottawa sent only \$118 million to provinces for roads and highway improvement. Now municipalities are promised 40% of their annual amount every single month in the coming three months as we head into an election campaign. It is quite simply a spending spree within 60 days of an election call and within 90 days of election day itself.

There is nothing whatsoever new here. This is simple, typical, Liberal vote buying politics of writing cheques to other levels of government with an IOU expected on election day, which could be as little as 90 days away from today.

Just as there is nothing fundamentally new in this arrangement, there is also nothing new in the deal itself. This is not a new deal. When Canadians think of a deal, they think of a negotiated agreement that leaves parties demonstrably better off. There is no evidence of a new deal. Rather, it is desperate acceptance by municipalities of the small crumbs that are being given to them by the federal government.

Had the cities been in a genuine bargaining position, they would have asked for funding that is reliable, stable, transparent and visible, with low administrative and compliance costs. They would have asked that it be new net money, not simply GST relief. The scheme the government has set up really is innocuous.

The number one problem with the GST in this country is not just that it is simply a tax on Canadians but also the administrative costs associated with the GST. Here is what the government has now said it is going to do, for example, for the city of Port Coquitlam; the mayor of Port Coquitlam is in town this week. Basically what the government has set up is that if a city or a municipality buys new snow removal equipment or salting trucks and so on, they pay GST on it. They do not pay the full 7% GST that everyday Canadians pay; they pay about 4% GST. The federal government is now saying that effective February 1 of this year municipalities will receive a rebate cheque for the GST they are paying on the buying of new equipment or for their expenditures.

The Address

What this does is further complicate the GST. It further complicates the tax code. It creates new loopholes that make the GST even less efficient. It puts the federal government again in the position of cutting cheques to other levels of government rather than giving them a new source of funding, a new, stable level of funding. The only way the municipalities get any kind of money at all is if they already spend money.

• (1200)

Specifically, as my colleague from Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar pointed out, rural municipalities, shrinking cities in British Columbia, cities like Port Coquitlam and places that are dealing with urban sprawl do not have new money to spend from which they would get a GST rebate.

There is an overall macroeconomic problem in the country, as per our Constitution and as per the services that Canadians expect. Two-thirds of the services that Canadians are provided with and enjoy from their levels of government are given to them by the provinces, subsequently by the municipalities but overwhelmingly by the provinces. The problem is that the federal government collects roughly two-thirds of the tax dollars that are expended by Canadians. There is a major disconnect.

We believe in honouring the Constitution of 1867 with delegated, enumerated and limited powers specifically to certain levels of government. The fact is that 99% of all roads in the country are engineered, built and maintained by the provinces and municipalities but half the cost of a litre of gasoline is taxes and half of those tax dollars go to Ottawa. This new deal for cities that was announced in the throne speech says nothing about starting the process to go down the road to giving those gas tax dollars to the level of government that is providing those services. This is where we get into the disconnect.

One level of government is responsible for providing services, another government taxes the money away while saying, “We will decide what roads get built, we will decide how it is done and by the way, we will cut the cheques just in time for an election campaign so everyone knows whom to thank and whom to elect in the ridings”. It is a cynical kind of politics that is precisely at the core of the democratic deficit which the Prime Minister preaches against.

Canadians want transparency, accountability and straight lines. If they are taxed for something, they expect it to go to that service. What we see in the throne speech is the further eroding of our tax code, creating huge loopholes that are open to abuse and making the GST even less efficient than it was before, which was already tremendously inefficient. What we are not giving to the municipalities is a new deal.

When a presumptive Prime Minister, when he was running for the leadership of the Liberal Party, stood up and said, “We are going to have a new deal”, that harkens back to F.D.R. and his grand view of social programs for the United States and the fallout of the 1929 Great Depression with new programs and social programs, establishing the safety net, making sure people do not fall behind, a new deal, a macro big program and a plan to get people going, to get a country ahead. “We have nothing to fear but fear itself”, he said.

A new deal; all that the Prime Minister's new deal has boiled down to is if we buy something, the federal government will give a rebate on some of the taxes but we have to buy it first and we will get some money just in time for an election campaign. It will be nice cheque. There will be a Governor of Canada stamp and it will be accompanied by a signed autographed picture of the Prime Minister just so that everyone remembers who the money was from.

That is essentially what the program is. The municipalities need new and stable funding. Some 85% of Canadians are living in and around cities. The municipalities need the gas tax dollars to make the needed expansions, to do the things they need to do so that they can grow, build and move forward.

The federal government needs to vacate the tax room. Two-thirds of the services are provided by the provinces but two-thirds of all tax dollars are being consumed by the federal government. We need a better equilibrium in that formula. We believe in stepping back, getting the federal government out of that tax room and giving it to the provinces so that Canadians have greater accountability from the levels of government that are providing those services.

We have seen the horror show in health care where the federal government has stepped into an area that is constitutionally provided for the provinces. It gets in there, buttresses itself in there so that it can play politics, look good, provide services and be seen as the compassionate, bleeding heart Liberal government being all things to all people. The average everyday citizens do not care who gets credit for giving programs. They do not care about that sort of stuff. They want services.

In rural Saskatchewan the roads are crumbling. There are gravel shoulders, the roads are unsafe, there are howling winds and there are no runaway lanes for trucks that are out of control. We do not have the basic things that Canada needs. It is the second largest land mass in the world. It is very thinly populated, spread out across the southern border of our country.

We need infrastructure. As per our Constitution that infrastructure is built, engineered and maintained by the provinces and municipalities. They do not have the money they need to get that job done.

The Prime Minister ran for office saying he was going to give a new deal. He has failed to do that in the throne speech. He has failed to sit down. He has failed to honour the House. In October last year we voted, along with the Prime Minister, that the government immediately have negotiations with the provinces and municipalities to do precisely what I have described, to roll back that balance of the two-thirds of the services provided by the provinces and the two-thirds of the taxes going to Ottawa.

The Address

●(1205)

He has failed that test. He has failed to honour and respect the House. The Prime Minister's new deal for cities is a sham. It is becoming a new deal for suckers. The democratic deficit which he said he was going to end will be expanding in two ways: by not honouring the vote in the House to give permanent, steady, new funding to municipalities and provinces; and also by failing to give Canadians the overall economic solution of making sure that the levels of government that provide the services are taxing at the appropriate level so citizens can get the government that they want at the price tag they expect. They do not want to see the cynical Liberal shell games that we are seeing with this throne speech of cutting cheques just in time for an election campaign. Canadians deserve better.

Hon. Paul Bonwick (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development (Student Loans), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for a well thought out and passionate speech about supporting smaller communities.

I do not disagree with the premise that the federal government needs to play a larger role in helping to offset some of the costs that municipalities have been asked to bear. I would suggest there are more reasonable ways to do it than simply allowing the provinces to make the decisions as to how the municipalities are going to spend their infrastructure dollars. In that regard the elimination of the GST puts money in their hands immediately.

I would ask the hon. member to take some time and call some municipalities within his own riding. He should ask the treasurers about the financial impact the elimination of the GST will have on some of the smaller communities. To use mine as an example, according to the treasurer of the town of Collingwood it is going to save somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$200,000 a year. He said that this is not a huge burden, that there is not a lot of red tape in dealing with it. Wasaga Beach is going to save almost \$400,000 a year.

I can only assume that like-sized municipalities in the member's riding are going to save the same kind of dollars. Has the member taken the time to call the treasurers? If he has not, would he make a commitment to the House today to call the treasurers to find out what the financial impact will be?

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, I talked to a Port Coquitlam city councillor yesterday actually and outlined what the government was planning on doing with regard to GST relief, that it would mean immediate money on their purchases on February 1. The city councillor's response was nothing.

The parliamentary secretary opposite has it precisely right. He said the benefit of this program is that cheques will start going out now. Municipalities will get the money right now. However the benefit is more political for the government than money for the cities. The benefit is immediate cheques cut by the government with IOUs just before an election campaign.

Before the member shakes his head and gets flustered, I will say that the benefit of this is that the money does start rolling now and that is fine, but it is not the long term solution. This is not a macro new vision, a new deal.

The Liberal government has been in power for a decade. When the Prime Minister was the finance minister he presented nine budgets. A majority government could have done this at any time. This is not a time crunch. Cities are not panicking. This is not a matter of cities needing money and cheques being cut immediately. The Liberal majority government had a decade to get it done and to rebalance that fiscal imbalance that I talked about. Two-thirds of the services are provided by the provinces. Two-thirds of the tax dollars are being consumed by the federal government. Yet the Liberals want a pat on the back because they are cutting cheques now before an election.

We need systematic, fundamental change and a rebalancing of fiscal federalism in this country so municipalities get steady financing. We do not need these kinds of cynical games.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will note that many of the themes in the Speech from the Throne have a large ticket price to them. Generating new revenue is difficult.

I wonder if the hon. member would share his views with us about what I find to be an outrageous situation. The government is forgoing revenue now by allowing business fines to be tax deductible. In other words, if a business is fined for polluting a river or injuring a worker or even insider trading, it can deduct that fine from its income tax. Estimates are that hundreds of millions of dollars of revenue are lost every year.

Would the hon. member agree with me that not another tax season should go by allowing this outrageous tax loophole where businesses can deduct fines from their taxes?

●(1210)

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary might like my answer to this one. The answer is just to build a bigger economic pie. I am kidding.

There is no question that we do have a serious problem with corporate welfare in this country. We have seen the corporate welfare and have raised it in question period with regard to Canada Steamship Lines and the figure of \$137,000 last year which this week ballooned to \$161 million. Corporate welfare is a serious problem in this country.

We in the new Conservative Party, the Progressive Conservative Party before that, the Canadian Alliance Party and the Reform Party before that, have always argued that the federal government should be neutral in issuing contracts. It should be open, free and honest tendering. We believe in free markets and open free trade. We believe in transparency and accountability. We do not believe in corporate welfare.

The Address

We believe in a thorough examination of all forms of corporate welfare to ensure there is not the kind of buying of businesses and selling things and the kind of corruption that is systemic in a lot of countries. That is going down the road of helping to eliminate the democratic deficit the Prime Minister talks about that we would act on and which needs to be done for this country.

Hon. Paul Bonwick (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development (Student Loans), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to provide my comments to the address in reply to the throne speech. I should mention at the outset that I will be splitting my time with my distinguished colleague, the member for Oak Ridges.

It is with an incredible sense of excitement that I stand here today and pass along my comments on the Speech from the Throne. It is a very exciting time for Canadians. They are at the leading edge, based on this throne speech. They are embarking on new territory. They are going to witness change that will make the country better. The Prime Minister has articulated a bold, creative, aggressive vision for the country. Canadians expect that because Canadians are bold, creative and aggressive. They expect no less from the government and this is exactly what the government has offered them.

I am going to touch on a number of different topics within the throne speech over the next seven or eight minutes. The first one I would like to touch on is municipalities.

The communities in my riding of Simcoe—Grey need help. We have played a very aggressive and complementary role over the last number of years in helping them address the infrastructure challenges they have had to face. There are a number of different cases. We have invested as much as \$5 million in an individual municipality to help it offset the challenges that it faces. Those municipalities rightly expect and deserve more. That is exactly what happened when the Prime Minister in his response to the throne speech outlined how he was going to do that. It comes in two forms.

One is the GST. I have contacted, not the municipal councillors that do not necessarily deal with the budget directly, but I have taken the time to contact some of the treasurers in my riding. The treasurers are telling me that this cash injection is instant. It provides them and their councils with the flexibility to make the choices they feel are important. It eliminates the federal and provincial governments from telling them what they should be doing versus empowering them to make the choices that the municipalities know are best for them.

It is not a small amount of money. The town of Collingwood will save over \$180,000 in this fiscal year. This will be money it can reinvest in roads, parks, ball fields, multi-use facilities, wherever it feels there is a priority. That will be \$180,000 now and forever more it will be able to spend on what it thinks is important. It does not have to apply to the province or the federal government, it will have the money in hand to apply to the priorities it feels are important.

Just two days ago I spoke to the deputy treasurer in the town of Wasaga Beach. It will have \$400,000 a year. Imagine what that can do to help offset debenture costs if it wants to embark on new roads, waste treatment or deal with some of the environmental challenges it is facing with the Nottawasaga River flowing through the municipality. Four hundred thousand dollars a year in 10 short

years will be \$4 million that it will be able to invest in its community. There are no strings attached, because the municipal government knows best within its own municipality and this achieves that objective. It empowers municipalities to make the right decisions, the decisions they know are right, the decisions the municipalities have made in supporting priorities.

This is exactly what the mayors asked for. I listened to the rhetoric across the floor about this being a political buy, that we are sending our pictures out. That is rhetoric. It is sheer nonsense. This is what the mayors asked for. We simply provided them with what they asked for.

I might suggest quite frankly that hon. members take some time away from reading the rhetoric and talk to some of the mayors because the mayors are so incredibly positive about this. Mayors all across our great country are saying, "At last, the federal government is stepping up to the plate and is playing a responsible role in supporting our municipalities".

• (12:15)

What is even more interesting is the fact that the Prime Minister is saying that we are not stopping here. The Prime Minister eloquently stated that we were prepared to work with lower tier levels of government, the municipal government, the provincial government, to ensure that there was even more funding to address the challenges municipalities were facing, as we could afford to do so.

It is not simply a one-time deal. The funding from the GST is long term. It will provide them the sustainable cash flows to deal with their priorities. They also have the commitment from the Prime Minister, who is quite frankly unparalleled in Canadian history when it comes to the level of support in the country, to work with them. That is one heck of a powerful statement, and municipalities can take that to the bank.

I would also like to take a few moments to talk about what I would suggest is our most precious resource, and certainly that is not gasoline or roads; it is our children, our youth.

Without doubt, the most aggressive and the most bold statement made in that throne speech, in my mind, was the Prime Minister's commitment in his response to the Speech from the Throne and the throne speech to address access need for post-secondary education. This is not simply universities. These are trade schools, colleges, polytech and most certainly universities as well.

Never in Canadian history have we seen such an aggressive approach to tearing down the barriers to post-secondary education.

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, with a special emphasis on the Canada student loan file, my responsibility is to ensure that I hear what the people in the industry are thinking, that I hear some of the solutions that are coming forward, that we do a cost-benefit analysis on these things and that we recognize that lower, moderate and middle income Canadians should not have barriers to post-secondary education as a simple result of finances. My job is to ensure that the Prime Minister knows that and that he is listening.

The Address

The fact that so much time was spent in his address on access to post-secondary education provides a bright star for the students in the country, whether they be 18 or 58. As we know, lifelong learning is an integral part of a growing economy.

More specifically, on the Canada student loan program, we are hearing a commitment from the Prime Minister. It should be mentioned that the Prime Minister is the first again in Canadian history to actually designate a parliamentarian to be responsible for access to post-secondary education or to have a parliamentarian responsible for the Canada student loan program. Before, it has been left in the hands of the bureaucrats and the minister who is responsible for so much more. That demonstrates the focus, the drive the Prime Minister will have in supporting access to post-secondary education and lifelong learning in this country. It is unparalleled.

He has looked at ways that are incredibly creative. He has listened to the over 14 associations that I have had an opportunity to meet with in the past few weeks, representing tens of thousands of students, representing colleges and universities and representing faculty. We have heard, we have listened and we have acted.

The Prime Minister has made unbelievable commitment to the students in the country to tear down the barriers that are restricting their access, raising the level for middle income families to qualify for the Canada student loan program, increasing the amount that one can borrow through the Canada student loan program to meet unmet need, extending the terms of repayment so that those coming out of university have some flexibility with respect to repayment, having the debt forgiveness and the interest forgiveness for those who simply cannot afford it and offering a new grant, a new learning bond, for students who need it most in the first year.

These are without doubt the most bold and creative focuses a government has shown in many years in addressing access to education. All parties in the House know two very important things. Our most valuable resources are our children and if we want to be a competitive economy in the 21st century, we better provide them access to education. The Prime Minister has done exactly that.

• (1220)

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Oak Ridges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to comment on the Speech from the Throne.

First, I would like to note that the Prime Minister clearly outlined a vision that Canadians can clearly understand: a compassionate society that invests in young people and technology and at the same time keeps the books balanced, which is very important.

I found it odd that before the Speech from the Throne was read critics on the other side were already denouncing it before it had actually been released. That kind of clairvoyance is something that is rather new. The Super 7 draw is on Friday at \$32.5 million. If they could tell us the numbers in advance, I think we would all benefit because they clearly already said there was nothing in the Speech from the Throne.

The Speech from the Throne in fact is not a detailed document. It obviously gives a broad brush to outline the direction that the government wants to take in the next few years. I point out that there were a number of key elements in it.

The first one clearly is on the issue of not going into a deficit, to ensure that whatever plans move forward they are done in a fiscally responsible manner. Canadians expect no less, demand no less and the government has a proven track record when it comes to strong fiscal management. It is important again, with six balanced budgets or better, in terms of paying down the national debt. It is important that when we invest, we do so responsibly.

Some people will argue that we are not back to 1993 levels in some areas. The fact is, if we look back at the financing in 1993, a third of it was borrowed money. We can now say with strict confidence that the moneys that are being allocated and spent are moneys that we have in the bank, and we are not borrowing.

A lot has been said about municipal governments and the new deal. I have many years in municipal politics as the former president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. I was around at the time arguing for a 100% rebate on the goods and services tax. In 1991 the Conservative government of the day agreed to a 57.14% rebate. I am of the view that municipal governments are like no other governments. It is a government and therefore it should not be taxed, provincial governments to federal and federal to provincial, and the same with municipal.

The Prime Minister announced that a 100% rebate would now be applied. It is estimated to be \$7 billion over 10 years. It is a significant infusion and is something that we as a government can do to assist in terms of transit, affordable housing, et cetera.

The point is municipal governments are still, under the constitution, creatures of the provinces. It is important to note that when we had legislation in the House a few years ago on Bill C-10 to ensure that we had timely payments as a federal government to municipal governments in this country, our friends over there, the johnny-come-latelies on the issue of municipal governments in Canada, opposed the national infrastructure in the 1993 program and opposed the issue of payments in lieu of taxes. Now they say we are not doing enough.

It is always easy for the opposition to say that we are not doing enough because one day they want the government to spend \$3 billion, the next day they want it to cut \$3 billion. The difficulty is it has to be done in partnership and in a responsible manner. The Prime Minister clearly has understood the needs of communities, large and small, and is prepared to work with them.

The issue I think is one of empowerment, so I am very pleased to see the Prime Minister in this Speech from the Throne address those issues and address them because we know that people, whether they live in small communities or large, need to have the proper environment. They need clean water and road systems. We have to ensure we are investing in the people in those communities.

The response of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the mayors is significant. In fact Mayor Miller of Toronto said that it fundamentally changed the nature of the relationship between cities and the federal and provincial governments forever. He said that it was a complete sea change, a breakthrough.

The Address

• (1225)

These are people who deal with the day to day issues in their communities. We realize that we cannot supplant the provinces, but we can work in conjunction with provinces, territories and municipal governments.

That is a fundamental recognition because 80% of the people in the country live in urban areas. That was obviously not the case in 1867 when we had about 6%. We have recognized that and are moving forward.

Regarding the issue of empowerment, colleagues across the way often talk about the fiscal imbalance in the country, which is a myth. Provinces have the ability to tax even more so than the federal government. When this government was in a situation where we had a \$42.5 billion deficit, we never heard the words "fiscal imbalance" emanate from that side of the House or from the provinces. Now with a much better fiscal situation in Canada, we now suddenly have this fiscal imbalance.

We have to also note in the Speech from the Throne the issue about investing in our social foundations. What could be better than to again provide an additional \$2 billion in the area of health care?

The Prime Minister has said we have to deal with the issue of waiting time for elective surgery, et cetera. However, the administration of the health care system is provincial and again we have to have accountability. We have to know that through the health care council Canadians want to know where their moneys are going and want to be able to track that money. Not the federal government, but Canadians need to know. Obviously if money is transferred, it is important because every time we make these agreements, the provinces then come back a few months later and say they need more. As the national roundtable on health concluded a number of years ago, it is not simply about money. It is about how the dollars are utilized. That is extremely important.

The Speech from the Throne talks about R and D investments. Nothing could be more important than ensuring that Canada is on the leading edge of research and development. Again, picking up on the innovation agenda, which we have been working on for the last few years, it is important to ensure that Canadians have an opportunity to do that type of research and development and that the opportunities are there whether they are medical or environmental in terms of R and D in particular.

I am very pleased to see that. I am also pleased because it demonstrates clearly to Canadians the social conscience of this government. It demonstrates that we can do things both in a fiscally responsible manner, but also ensure that there is an investment in families and children and that the Canadian population will benefit because of that.

Also, we have enunciated clearly in the Speech from the Throne our responsibility on the global stage. Again, I applaud the Prime Minister for the invitation to Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations to come here. We are a nation that believes in a multilateral approach. We are a nation that has taken on our responsibilities. If we go back to the great war or World War II, volunteers went overseas because they believed in the cause for

which they were fighting. We have always responded to our international commitments.

We continue to do that today through our peacekeeping forces around the world. We respond through agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency. That is important and our response on the issue of HIV-AIDS and the issue of generic drugs. Again, proceeding with that legislation is so important. It shows that we are not simply concerned about our own national interest, but also our responsibility on the world stage. That again outlines the type of compassionate society that Canadians want and expect us to lead as a national government.

• (1230)

Hon. Paul Bonwick (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development (Student Loans), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations to the very thoughtful and insightful remarks made by my hon. colleague. As my colleague made mention, in his previous life as a municipal councillor and mayor, he was what is affectionately known as the mayor of mayors for Canada.

It is important to mention for the record that in this Parliament and in the previous Parliament I know of no other colleague who has put forward the level of support and encouragement to this federal government to play a more active part in the life of municipalities. For that, I commend him. On behalf of my municipalities, I thank him.

I am interested in knowing what the hon. member's thoughts are with respect to some of the municipalities in his riding and how the elimination of the GST may help them.

Mr. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments and for his question.

One of the things that is extremely important about this 100% rebate is that it is very visible. It is accountable and transparent because municipal governments buy all sorts of goods and services where there is a GST implication.

The fact is that they will be able to determine and demonstrate clearly the savings to their communities. Whether it is a small community in my riding, such as Whitchurch-Stouffville, which will save moneys in the range of \$20,000, or a city like Richmond Hill, which will save millions of dollars.

We can demonstrate that and do it in that manner. Municipal politicians for years have been saying they are an order of government and should be treated as such. One of the ways is not to tax one order of government to another. That is very important.

As the member well knows, because of his own work in his community, there is a role for the national infrastructure program. The FCM called for a national 10 year program for years and the government delivered. Again, an initial down payment of \$1 billion and of course we have the strategic infrastructure fund as well.

We are engaged with, not supplanting, the municipal governments. We recognize that, the Constitution notwithstanding, we have a responsibility. The Prime Minister has been so articulate and so clear on this particular issue, recognizing that we have an important collaborative role.

The Address

Let us make sure that whether it is Collingwood in the member's riding, Richmond Hill in my riding or wherever it is across the country, we engage those communities. We must engage them because if we make laws which will negatively impact, financially for example, a city, it needs to be at the table to be part of the discussions.

It does not mean we supplant the role and the jurisdictional issues with regard to provinces, but if somebody were to make a law which would impact positively or negatively on a society, the cities need to be part of the process. We do that in our own communities. We talk to our constituents, we hold public forums and we engage them. Why would we not do the same with cities?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have an editorial referring to the levies on property owners. I want to hear what the member thinks about this:

It's tough to quibble with such initiatives as exempting municipal governments from the GST—Ottawa never should have been taxing municipal governments, which are financed by levies on property owners paid with their after-tax income—and even with returning a portion of gas taxes to civic governments to address infrastructure needs that have been neglected for too long.

Government members are talking like that tax is theirs to spend. We pay those taxes. Those taxes are levied on us. Would the member like to comment on this article?

• (1235)

Mr. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, the predecessors of the new Conservative Alliance, the Conservative Party of Canada under Mr. Mulroney had an option in 1991. The option was to give 100% rebate on the GST so there would have been no tax in 1991. In fact, it wanted to impose the 100%. Fortunately, through the FCM, we were able to negotiate the 57.14% rebate.

As to the issue of property taxes, it is the most outdated form of taxation I have every heard of. They do not reflect the reality of service provided today. Unfortunately, the issue of assessment in dealing with property taxes, certainly in the province of Ontario, is provincial. I will not try to explain any rule or rationale with regard to property taxes because they do not make a lot of sense. They are certainly outdated, which is why the government has taken such a proactive role in assisting communities large and small across the country.

[Translation]

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Rosemont—Petite-Patrie.

I am extremely pleased to take part in the throne speech debate. I know how much all members want to voice their views on this document, which is short on content. It is probably the longest throne speech on paper since we became elected officials but the shortest on content. Many have commented that it could have been written by the former prime minister and that it probably would not have been much different.

I was particularly struck by one paragraph, on page 5 in English and page 6 in French. In order to understand the true meaning of this sentence, I checked to see if, perhaps, the translation carried a certain nuance. I could hardly believe that this was what the government really meant. It states, and I quote:

Jurisdiction must be respected.

The person who wrote the beginning of this paragraph probably forgot to read the rest of the speech, because this sentence totally contradicts everything else.

If jurisdiction must be respected, then provincial areas of jurisdiction must not be encroached on. However, almost the entire document attests to the fact that the government did just that. Before, there was a formula, the old served with a modern twist; now, it is the new served with an old time twist. That would be a better way to describe this government, which claims to be a new government.

This sentence clearly reflects a thought voiced by the Minister of Social Development and published in *Le Devoir* on January 21, 2004:

When 81% of Canadians, including Quebecers, demand that something be done, it is our duty to respond. If one level of government does not want to do it, the other can do it and negotiate.

I have done many things in my life, including negotiate collective agreements. I never signed collective agreements before bargaining. I always bargained before signing. Before collective bargaining, I never publicly announced the details of the UQAR professors' collective agreement. The details are always kept very secret, except to our members, before being made public.

The federal government is in the very bad habit of saying, with its spending power and its usual arrogance, that it will do this or that, it will intervene in parental leave, in compassionate care leave, in health, it will ask the deputy minister to create another new complicated system and then spend money on the structure and officials rather than transfer money to the provinces so that they can provide the best care to our fellow citizens.

Of course, afterwards, there is a qualifier. After clearly stating that "jurisdiction must be respected", they say:

But Canadians do not go about their daily lives worried about which jurisdiction does this or that.

Of course, if every effort is made to confuse Canadians, they will not be asking who does what. They will take what they can get. A person in need does not look a gift horse in the mouth. You do not bite the hand that feeds you, you take what you get.

They expect, rightly, that their governments will cooperate—

That they will cooperate, not go over people's heads. There absolutely needs to be more cooperation, such as making a simple phone call to the head of the other government requesting a meeting to discuss common interests, not just publicly announcing in the newspapers that the program is in effect and explaining how things are going to work. By then, it is much too late to turn back.

• (1240)

The current government has held three elections and it is getting ready for a fourth. It has held three elections on the backs of workers, each time promising employment insurance reform.

The Address

On June 6, 2003, when he was touring Quebec, the Prime Minister met with workers from Charlevoix and promised them that on becoming Prime Minister, he would do something about reforming employment insurance, because, he said, he realized—

An hon. member: Oh. Oh.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, would you please ask that person to be quiet and let me speak?

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member who has the floor has asked the Chair to intervene so that members might be respectful of each other. While one is speaking, please wait to make an intervention under the question and comment period. In that way we could probably proceed in a more respectful manner.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister promised he would do something. When the people of Charlevoix, the sans-chemise and the Mouvement Action Chômage read the speech, or heard it read by the Governor General, they said to themselves, “This makes no sense. We have been totally betrayed”. There was not a single word about employment insurance. Not one word.

As a result, they were extremely disappointed. We cannot see things continuing like this. When we in the Bloc are campaigning, we will be asking the people of Quebec to keep in mind that not one word from the Liberal Party of Canada can be believed any more. This is at least the third time they have lied.

They lied when they campaigned on the promise to scrap the GST. Now they have decided to give part of it back to the municipalities, which are the creatures of the provinces. Then, on page 6 of the throne speech in French, page 5 in English, they say, “Jurisdiction must be respected”. Now they want to talk directly with the municipalities, big governments that they are, because they are looking for political allies, of course.

Since there has not been much going on in government between November 10 and February 2, I have had a lot of time for reading. My recreational reading included Jacques Attali's *Le dictionnaire du XXI^e siècle*, published by Fayard in 1998. On page 68 of this dictionary of the 19th century, there is a definition of Canada. I was curious to see what this might be. It reads:

Canada: Laboratory for Utopia....

As you know, Utopia is a scheme planned for planning for better and for worse. Continuing the definition:

Canada: Laboratory for Utopia. Its future will depend on the future of Quebec.

That is what it says in the dictionary by Jacques Attali, dating from 1998. He understood what the Bloc Québécois has been explaining here every since 1993: the future of Canada is tied to the future of Quebec, and the future of Quebec is sovereignty. That is what we will continue to tell people. Particularly after a throne speech such as the one we have just had, there is no reason for us to set aside our plan for the future, a plan so dear to our hearts: to have a country of our own, and to have it as soon as possible.

●(1245)

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech by the member opposite. I somewhat agree with the idea that federal government money should be spent on federal responsibilities. I agree with that. There is a general feeling that, if the federal government spends all kinds of money on provincial or municipal responsibilities, this creates a jurisdictional problem between the levels of government.

I noticed in the Speech from the Throne that the government is proposing to provide the municipalities with full relief from the GST that they are currently paying. I wonder if the member opposite agrees with the idea of having the federal government give federal revenue to municipalities and do so, as we say in English, with no strings attached?

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his very interesting question.

The act of taking the GST and giving it to municipalities is not something I oppose, but I do object to the way it is being done. The municipalities are creatures of the provinces. Tomorrow morning, the provinces could pass a law and say that the cities no longer exist. They could say, “We are managing the citizens directly and creating a different structure”. That is why this government must go through the provinces and say, “Look, we intend to do such and such; what do you think about it?” Because we are partners and collaborators, we must talk to each other before decisions are made. It is not right to present us with a fait accompli. When the first ministers met with the Prime Minister at a football game in Regina, they could have talked about it then.

And as for the portion of the GST they are prepared to give away, perhaps it would be better to give it to the hospitals or the education system. I have been in this House for 10 years and every time we have a day devoted to the problem of illiteracy, we ask that the GST on books be removed. Ignorance is taxed in Canada. We have been asking for 10 years that the tax on books be removed, but nothing gets done about it in the budget.

This is not about getting rid of the GST and giving it back to the provinces; it is about the way it is being done, and the way it is being done without any discussions before decisions are made. If a new way of doing things is announced, we need to see a change accordingly. Things must not be worse than before. If a change has been made, I hope it is for the better.

●(1250)

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I first want to thank my colleague from Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis for her excellent presentation, particularly toward the end. Intellectually, it is very healthy to seek the opinion of a foreign observer, such as Mr. Attali, looking at the evolution of both Canada and Quebec. We heard his opinion. It is a succinct and extremely well-founded opinion in terms of how he sees the future.

The Address

I would like to know what my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette-et-la Mitis thinks of the current reasoning with regard to the way the Canadian federal system works and evolves. It is personified by the new Minister of Social Development, who says that the federal government's role is to respond to the needs. The institution in the best position to respond to the needs of the public must blithely go about its business while ignoring the Constitution.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question, and I thank my colleague for his comments.

The Minister of Social Development must face the fact that she is sitting there because she is the member for Verdun—Saint-Henri—Saint-Paul—Pointe Saint-Charles and she is from Quebec. She represents the nationalist wing of the Quebec Liberal Party.

She must understand that, just because someone wants something, that does not mean he should get it. Just because a teenager wants a Ferrari at age 18, that does not mean his father will buy him one. Just because 83% of the population wants something, that does not mean the federal government should be the one to provide it. The federal government has to sit down and say, “83% of the population wants this, what can we do together? We are partners in providing it to the public”.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise today to participate in this debate in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

In the few minutes I have at my disposal, I will focus primarily on matters relating to sustainable development, beginning on page 19 of this week's throne speech.

In so doing, I will be able to demonstrate just how much the government is trying, in an underhanded way, to have us believe that the environment and sustainable development have now become priorities for this government. From now on, the new government, which is really just a rehash of the old one, wants to convince us of its intention to meet its commitments, both national and international, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and invest in green technologies.

The first aspect addressed in the throne speech is the matter of climate change and the Kyoto accord. On page 19, the government states that it “will respect its commitments to the Kyoto accord”, and I emphasize the following:

—in a way that produces long-term and enduring results while maintaining a strong and growing economy.

I would draw the House's attention to the words “long- term and enduring”. Although the Kyoto protocol does not use exactly these words, it clearly clarifies the time frame for states to meet their targets, such as Canada's target of reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 6%, not as a long-term strategy, but between 2008 and 2012.

Our concern with this throne speech as far as the implementation of the Kyoto protocol is concerned is whether Canada will use its prerogative to renew its commitment to a 6% reduction for the second phase. We know that Canada is already negotiating with some industrial sectors putting off emission reductions until the next phase, that is, after 2012.

What we would have liked the government to do is clarify when it intends to meet its commitments, and that Canada's commitment will respect the greenhouse gas emission time frame, that is a reduction of 6% in the period from 2008 to 2012, precisely so that the Canadian government does not put off its greenhouse gas emission reductions to the second phase, when that time frame is set.

We are also a little surprised to learn that:

It will do so by developing an equitable national plan, in partnership with provincial and territorial governments and other stakeholders.

That plan is to have us believe that, in terms of sharing the efforts toward Kyoto, Canada has chosen a territorial approach to reduction. What we in the Bloc Québécois want is to be able to tell each of the provinces that they have a reduction target of x% and that they can meet this target any way they want, considering the economic and industrial structure and the realities of the climate, which differs from coast to coast.

Although the government wants us to believe that it has a territorial approach, it has chosen a sectoral approach, negotiating greenhouse gas emissions with each of the industrial sectors.

The proof is that the government is already negotiating greenhouse gas emission reductions with the oil, auto, aluminum and paper industries, while Quebec is still waiting its turn to negotiate with the federal government.

● (1255)

There is a risk for us in Quebec. We were in favour of ratifying Kyoto.

But when we learn that negotiations with Quebec have not yet begun and that secret agreements are being entered into with the oil industry, the risk to Quebec is that we may end up bearing the brunt of the rest of the reductions and having to pay the price for certain industrial sectors' lack of effort in recent years.

The second important aspect concerns the famous environmental indicators. Building on the report by the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy, which presented us with air, water and forest quality indicators a few months ago—and expressed the wish that these be integrated with government decision making—we learn today that the government does indeed plan to incorporate key indicators on clean water, clean air, and emissions reduction into its decision making.

As far as the environment is concerned, the same problem exists as in the provinces in the health sector. People are hired to create indicators, but there are no resources in the field with which to properly assess the situation.

To give one example, I will refer the hon. members to the *Canada Gazette* for January 31, as reported this morning in the *Journal de Montréal*. Strange as it may seem, in Quebec, and only in Quebec, 39 of the 54 atmospheric pollution surveillance centres need to be replaced and need new ozone detectors.

The Address

There is something not right in Quebec. I stress Quebec—and I encourage you to read the *Canada Gazette*—because, in all other provinces the detectors and surveillance centres appear to be fine. Strange as it may seem, most of the ones in Quebec are obsolete. This means that the pollution indicators used to inform the people of Quebec and purchased and provided to the Government of Quebec to evaluate such things as atmospheric pollution and ozone, which are the causes of serious public health problems such as asthma and bronchitis, are inadequate.

Why is Quebec not getting its fair share of equipment, to ensure that the commitments in the Speech from the Throne are met and that reliable indicators are available? There is something not right here.

Especially since we know that, on May 19, 2000, in a speech that the environment minister delivered to the University Club of Toronto, he announced that he intended to do the following, and I quote:

We will double our support for the Air Pollution Surveillance Network. We will use the money to update monitoring equipment and manage important air quality information.

Investment was doubled, yet two years later, we realize that, in Quebec, nearly 80% of the equipment and Quebec's monitoring centres are obsolete. Where did the money go? This is money coming from the taxes Quebecers have paid and are entitled to as part of the additional \$1.2 million the federal government gave the provinces. It does not add up. Spending doubled for the monitoring centres and equipment two years ago, but 39 out of 54 centres in Quebec are obsolete.

This means Quebec did not get its fair share in terms of monitoring centres, testing units, air quality and air pollution testing equipment. This means—and it is not insignificant—this is equipment required to fight disorders such as asthma and bronchitis.

In my final minute, I want to add that it must be recognized that the Speech from the Throne is ensuring that, once again, Quebec will not get its fair share, not only with respect to past investments, but also in measures the federal government is about to announce.

●(1300)

We will wait for the budget because, after all, it will tell us what the funding will be for these measures. Rest assured, I will be back in this House and we will be here to make sure Quebec gets its fair share of the budget. We will make sure that funding comes back to Quebec.

[English]

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague with great interest. I am wondering if my colleague had forgotten to look at the 2003 budget and to read what is now currently in the Speech from the Throne.

I would like to go over a couple of things. On sustainable development, the throne speech states:

Safeguarding our natural environment—in the here and now, and for generations to come—is one of the great responsibilities of citizens and governments in the 21st century.

It goes on and I am sure if my hon. colleague bothers to read it, it is both in French and in English, he will see that we address that.

I would like to go over what we did in the 2003 budget for sustainable development. The 2003 budget committed \$3 billion to key environmental initiatives: \$2 billion over five years to help implement the Government of Canada's climate change plan, including measures to encourage new environmental technologies and funding for initiatives ranging from renewable energy to alternative fuels where areas such as building retrofits, wind power, fuel cells and ethanol will be considered; and \$1 billion for targeting measures including improving air quality and supporting the cleanup of contaminated sites. It goes on and on.

I am sure that if my hon. colleague pays a little bit of attention and reads the text, it is all there. If there are specific problems that are being faced, we will be more than glad to sit down with the member and discuss it. If we need to get the equipment that he needs in Quebec, we will certainly discuss that with him.

Enough of the rhetoric. That party wants to get down to business. We want to govern this country. It is there. It is in black and white. If he needs something specific, let us address it. I am wondering which part of the black and white my hon. colleague forgot to read.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, my colleague did not, in fact, read the most recent budget tabled. If the government wanted to reach its emission reduction targets as set out in the Kyoto protocol, for a 240 megatonne reduction in emissions, how is it that the latest budget allows a reduction of only 20 megatonnes out of 240 megatonnes? If the government has truly adopted a greener approach, it has to show.

There is nothing for green transportation. There is funding only for industries to convert from one fossil fuel to another. There was an expectation, and there is still an expectation concerning the next budget, that, if the government opposite is serious about going green, it will have to give equal funding to the oil and gas industry and to environmental technologies.

Bill C-48, which his government supported, grants \$250 million in financial and tax incentives to major oil companies. Is this going greener? Is this a good investment for those who are friends of the system?

Consider tax incentives for renewable energy sources, including wind power, and compare them to those in a conservative state or a country such as the United States. If the government is serious, it will realize that, even in the U.S., tax incentives for wind power are far beyond what is being offered in Canada.

The Address

If the government is serious, in its next budget, it will stop funding the hydrocarbon and oil industries. It will give equal funding to renewable energy and wind energy. It will invest in green transportation so that the empty promises and lack of vision in the throne speech are turned into concrete action and funding in the next budget.

• (1305)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the hon. member for Rosemont—Petite-Patrie and is on the same issue, namely Kyoto. The other day, I asked the Minister of the Environment how he plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by another 40 to 60 megatonnes. He told me that he would negotiate with the provinces.

I wonder if the hon. member could tell us whether he thinks that the provinces, including Quebec, are prepared to negotiate on such a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes, Quebec is prepared to negotiate. What Quebec had hoped for, in the announcement made in August by the Prime Minister on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, is that Quebec would get its fair share, that is \$250 million to implement its action plan on climate change.

In Quebec, we must reduce our emissions in the transportation sector, which accounts for 38% of greenhouse gas emissions. Right now, we cannot get our fair share. Why? Because the action plan on climate change and the financial plan do not provide any funding for environmentally friendly means of transportation. This leaves \$160 million for partnerships with the provinces, which is very little.
[English]

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the House for the opportunity to participate in the debate today on the Speech from the Throne. I will be sharing my time with the member for Winnipeg South Centre.

I want to associate myself with the great majority of speakers in the House, the great majority of speakers from civic and non-governmental organizations, and the great majority of Canadians, in saying that the statements, the messages, and the directions contained in the Speech from the Throne are embraced and welcomed.

It is my belief that the Speech from the Throne and the subsequent speech which we heard from the Prime Minister on Tuesday of this week reflect the actions that Canadians want the government to take. These actions include: living within our means, investing as we can afford, and laying the plans for the future. This is an aggressive and realistic agenda.

I like the general themes set out in the throne speech. I support the Prime Minister's objectives of dealing with our health care system. I support the new deal that was laid out for this nation's municipalities.

The statement and subsequent legislation introduced to the House changing the way things work in Ottawa is a major step in the right direction. Parliament is a tremendous institution but like every institution change is needed every now and then, and that time is now. I embrace these changes with confidence.

I fully support the statement that the government is launching a process of expenditure review. This is not something that should be launched. It should be an ongoing process. Every government, company, organization, family, and individual, should continually reallocate resources to present and emerging priorities. Taxpayers expect nothing less from us as a government.

I fully endorse the goals within the throne speech to strengthen Canada's social foundations. It has long been proven that there is a very strong connection between a strong social foundation and a strong economy.

The best investment, and it is not the only one from a social foundation point of view, is early childhood education. The government's goal to accelerate some of the initiatives under the early childhood development accord, already announced, will pay dividends down the road.

With regard to dealing with persons with disabilities, I support the goal to work with provinces and the territories to do more than what is being done now, to fill in the gaps in our educational system and skills development, and to put in place workplace supports to accommodate Canadians with disabilities.

The federal government ought to be a leader in this regard as the biggest employer in this country. The continual problem with the tax system—the fairness in which persons with disabilities are designated by CCRA—is going to be dealt with.

It is an aggressive agenda but it is also a progressive agenda. It is an agenda which I support and a direction which I believe all Canadians will support.

There is one area which I would like to dwell on and one area that I am particularly pleased with and that is the government's announcement to deal with the whole area of student loans and post-secondary student financing.

Right now the government is doing a lot in this whole area. A lot of money has been put into research right across Canada, funding for the granting councils, research chairs, and millennium scholarships. There is also the educational tax credit, the RESP system, and the Canada student loan program.

• (1310)

There is a whole continuum of support and a lot of money being spent. Despite that, there are still very significant problems. As a member of Parliament who deals with these issues on a daily basis, I see these problems. There are problems with young Canadians deciding whether to attend post-secondary institutions and making this decision on financial considerations. There are problems with young Canadians within post-secondary institutions deciding whether to remain in a post-secondary institution, and financing becomes a part of that consideration.

There are also problems after a person graduates from university, making that leap to the job market when the person has a certain amount of student loan debt.

The Address

I was so pleased to see that some of the directions set out in the Speech from the Throne will make the system fairer, especially for lower income Canadians. It is my belief that the education tax credit, the RESP system and the millennium scholarship system are working well but only working well for middle and higher income Canadians. It is perhaps the situation that we do not need a lot more money going into the system but the system can be improved considerably by reallocating the money that is already in the system. I would have a long look at the educational tax credit. Perhaps more of that money could be redirected to students from lower income families.

The objective set out in the Speech from the Throne to modernize the Canada student loan program, which means increasing loan limits, expanding the whole definition of expense deductibility and increasing income thresholds, are welcome initiatives, but loans are not the total answer. That is why I support the whole continuum of announcements that were set out in the Speech from the Throne.

Many young Canadians are having difficulty making that connection between the university degree and the job market. They do this with a student loan, which leads to a considerable amount of stress. I would like to see the system fairer for these young students who are having difficulty finding a job.

Another welcome announcement is the announcement to provide first year grants to lower income students and also to create incentives for lower income families to invest in the RESP program. It will depend on how the system evolves but I view these as tremendous announcements which I think will make the system fairer and level the playing field for everyone.

This is what I consider to be a tremendous announcement and one which I urge the government to move on with haste. I would like to see these announcements, these directions and these programs in place for the students who graduate from high school this June and enter post-secondary institutions in September.

In closing, I applaud the government for the directions, the programs and the initiatives announced in Monday's speech. I, like a great majority of Canadians, fully support the direction the government is taking and I am proud to part of it. I look forward to the tabling of the budget some time in the next month or two.

• (1315)

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, given that the throne speech, which was a little over an hour long and had precisely 4,662 words in it, did not have one word that was fish, fisheries or any derivative thereof, could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans tell us why the throne speech does not make one mention of fisheries or the fisheries industry?

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, this is a continual problem in the House and particularly with members of that party. They will take a document and, instead of reading the document, they count the words. They read every word and if something is not mentioned they come forward and ask why this or that was not mentioned.

I gave a speech this afternoon in which I set out the government's agenda, the programs, the policies and the initiatives of where the government is heading. I think it is good. There are all kinds of other

issues that the government is working on now. Programs have been announced in the last eight months. The government is a whole continuum and fisheries is part of it.

The document is not perfect. I for one do not think that what is in the throne speech on the aboriginal issue is an answer to the issue. However I support the creation of an independent centre for aboriginal governance. I think it is a good initiative. Will it answer the issue? No. It needs more work.

• (1320)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am quite amazed that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans would not even mention fisheries in his speech. However I want to ask him a very specific and direct question.

On page 17 of the throne speech it states that the government wants to develop Canada's energy resources and provide opportunities to maximize the potential of our vast coastal and offshore areas through a new oceans action plan. It says energy and oceans in the same breath. I am very nervous about what that will mean to the habitat, the ecological grounds of our fish, and for fishermen and their coastal communities.

I am not the only one who thinks that way. The B.C. energy minister, Richard Neufeld, today said that he believes Ottawa will lift the moratorium on offshore oil and gas in British Columbia, right in the ecological grounds off the Queen Charlotte Islands where a tremendous fishing opportunity exists for fishermen and aboriginal groups. It is an area that has sustained those people for thousands of years.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans tell us whether Canada is serious about lifting the moratorium on oil and gas on the west coast? Also, on the east coast, this is a government that allows seismic testing on inshore waters when the government's own scientists say that they have very serious concerns about what seismic testing will do to fish stocks in those waters.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I would like a nice, clear answer from my colleague from Prince Edward Island.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, my learned friend brings up a point that I did not raise, and I am glad he did; the announcement in the Speech from the Throne that the government will come forward with a Canada oceans action plan.

My learned colleague brings up some good points. It is a horizontal issue. It does not deal only with fisheries. It does not deal only with energy. It does not deal only with environment. It deals with a whole continuum of departments, which is why the government needs an oceans action plan to deal with these issues, which are so complex, so vast and so important. These issues have to be dealt with on an integrated basis, not only with the Government of Canada but with the governments of the provinces and territories, and with all stakeholders. I look forward to working on the development and implementation of that plan.

The Address

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have heard it said “May you live in interesting times”. I suggest that all members present today would agree that we do indeed live in interesting times.

Right now, we in Canada live in one of the most secure, well off, stable countries on the face of the earth. On the national level, we all work diligently to develop programs and initiatives that effectively address issues concerning health care, education and homelessness, to name but a few.

Similarly, at the international level, societies around the globe are compelled to come to terms with and seek solutions to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, clandestine and state terrorism and devastating living conditions among two-thirds of the world's population.

In the face of these domestic and international challenges, I stand before the House with hope and with confidence. My confidence stems from an understanding of the strengths of Canadian politics while my optimism stems from Canadians themselves.

Yes, we have gone through a change in government, a process not without its challenges, but the government has done it. We have changed leadership, we have changed cabinet and now we have presented changes in how we want to do things. We will demonstrate to the Canadian public that we are going to produce the government that is needed for the beginning of the 21st century. We have the people, we have the resources and we have the will.

The Prime Minister said it best most recently at the world economic forum in Switzerland. He spoke about the future of Canada and said:

The domestic political process is open and full of energy. It is about making the right choices among competing interests in priorities, choices which reflect the way ahead. Debates and trade-offs occur—in our Cabinets, in our Legislatures, in our town halls with our citizens. Eventually decisions are reached.

That is what I enjoy most in this role: this process of debate about choices, not only with my colleagues in Parliament but with the many citizens in our communities. We all need to discuss the way ahead.

So much is going on for us as Canadians. It is important to me to be part of a government that leads in the global campaign to provide affordable medicine to Africa in the fight against HIV and AIDS. It is important to me to be part of a government that upholds the principles of medicare. It is equally important to me that our medical system responds to the changing realities of science, demographics, technology and the global challenges of diseases such as avian flu and SARS. That is why it is so important that Canada is part of the global emergency preparedness network.

I fully support the creation of the new Canada public health agency which will ensure the threat of infectious diseases is met quickly, efficiently and appropriately as these new and dangerous diseases surface in Canada and around the world. The establishment of the new infectious diseases control lab is a very important initiative. I would suggest, humbly and strongly, that the best possible location in the country for this lab is indeed in Winnipeg where those at the microbiology lab responded so brilliantly to the SARS threat earlier this year.

It is also important to me to be part of a government that looks ahead with regard to our seniors. In the past six months I participated in a task force on seniors. The issues, challenges and opportunities facing public policy makers and those interested in an aging population became clear: access to health care, transportation, elder care, ageism, income support and housing.

As I move around my community of Winnipeg South Centre I see 85 year old women looking after 81 year old men. I see 70 year old children looking after 92 year old parents. This concerns me. What will happen when one of them is no longer healthy? We need to look at the future of health care and the elderly.

Our challenge as politicians is to continue to uphold the principles of medicare that were developed by our parents. We owe them nothing less.

● (1325)

The organization of communities and cities because of shifting demographics will become increasingly important. It is important to develop the strategies and tools to deal with our generation getting older.

It is very important to me to be part of a government that looks ahead and recognizes that a good education is an essential ingredient of a vibrant, healthy community and country. To me it is particularly important that we work toward reducing student debt. I have heard far too many stories of crippling student debt, not only in my riding but across the country. I believe that it is time we worked with the other levels of government to develop a comprehensive plan that helps the students, their parents and the educational institutions.

On Monday the government did just that and announced that new incentives will be forthcoming to assist low income families to begin investing right from the birth of their children for their long term education. The new learning bond announced by the Prime Minister will help low income families begin the necessary savings for their children's post-secondary education.

I applaud the government for taking the initiative to provide starter grants for low income students to help cover first year tuition costs. This is a tremendous move in helping students access education.

The modernization of the Canada student loans program is a welcome acknowledgement of the importance of access to educational opportunities of all young people, whatever their economic background.

The Prime Minister has also set out on a rather unique path to engage our youth. When the Prime Minister returned the doll, Flat Mark, which we have all heard so much about, and when he spoke to the students, he said:

What Flat Mark has done is he has brought to Ottawa, to the nation's capital, to the government, this idea from you about how important it is that government look at new ideas, that they look at things differently and that government learn from people.

I am sure those children will remember the story of Flat Mark throughout their lives.

The Address

I believe that as politicians today we have a singular responsibility. The challenge we all face will be to safeguard the hard won financial and economic gains that have been accrued by Canada since we first balanced the budget in 1997 and paid down millions of dollars in debt.

Having said that, it is critical that we acknowledge the importance of the start we give our children, the access to education we give our students, the support we give to families, the health care we give to all our citizens, the openness we have to immigrants and refugees, the commitment to ensure gender equality and the hope that we give to those less privileged.

We need cooperative government, we need to end the blame game and we need a new approach to intergovernmental relations.

Some 80% of Canadians live in urban settings. We have heard much in recent days of the new deal for cities, of crumbling infrastructure and fiscal shortfalls. Those are very important issues. Now, the government has started the process of renewal. The results are immediate. As of February 1, the GST rebates began to accumulate.

I believe that my home city of Winnipeg is on the cusp of renewed greatness. We have new developments throughout the city and to me this is what government is all about. We need to continue to deal with the issues of the day. They are not unimportant, but we have to move ahead.

Winnipeg is home to one of the largest aboriginal communities in all of Canada. I visited many aboriginal based projects in Winnipeg and elsewhere in the country. In Winnipeg we have programs of gang members building and rebuilding their community and creating homes. I visited a grassroots drop-in centre in Regina. Not long ago I had the pleasure of helping open the first aboriginal sweat lodge in Winnipeg. The activities of MaMaWiChita and Urban Circle are models of urban service development.

What I see when I visit these various projects is certainly not despair. I very much welcome the important expansion of the urban aboriginal strategy announced in the throne speech.

I welcome the opportunity for all levels of government and urban aboriginal and Metis people to work together. It is critical that all levels leave behind the jurisdictional wrangling within governments and between governments that prevent all the good work being performed by the various agencies that I spoke of earlier.

• (1330)

It has been said, "Every once in awhile the door opens to let the future in". Today the door is open. It is an opportunity for all Canadians to go through it together.

In closing, I offer to the House the wisdom of Yogi Berra who once said and I quote:

You got to be careful if you don't know where you're going, because you might not get there.

The throne speech laid out where we are going. I look forward to the implementation of all of the initiatives put forward for the benefit of all Canadians, so that we can indeed get there.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask a question of my colleague from Winnipeg South Centre. I certainly agree with her last comment, that it helps through a Speech from the Throne for all of us here in this place and across Canada to know where we are going and where the government is going. Part of the problem we have is that sometimes the government stakes out where we are going and then never lives up to that commitment. Then we do not know where we are at.

There is an issue no more pressing in that regard than child care. The member for Winnipeg South Centre knows that we have a very active child care community in Winnipeg that was dearly hoping that finally the longest running broken promise in the history of politics, that of a national day care program, would have ended with a clear commitment in the Speech from the Throne.

The member will know that instead of that clear commitment we have some very vague general statement about cooperating with the provinces to accelerate initiatives under the present agreement to identify children at risk and to ensure the safety of children, blah, blah, blah.

That is not a clear commitment to a national day care program, something which the Manitoba Child Care Association would like to see and has long requested. That association has also asked the government if it would look at the Manitoba model, which is seen as one of the best in this country, as the example for the rest of Canada and that it become a pilot project for pursuing this goal.

Does the member support that idea? Will she advance that idea with the minister responsible? Will she at least get the Manitoba model used as an example for furthering our objective of a national child care program?

• (1335)

Ms. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying that I do not agree with her characterization of the blah, blah, blah of the throne speech. There is much in the throne speech to offer hope and excitement for those involved in the early child care and the day care movement.

The Manitoba model is indeed a model that one would hope will be replicated across the country. I too have met with many members of the Manitoba Child Care Association. I have been working with their representatives and with colleagues to advance their issues here in this capital.

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is my colleague's position on why justice was left out of the throne speech?

I know the city of Winnipeg has an aboriginal gang problem. The same is developing in my city of Saskatoon. This causes me great concern, and money is not being put into our police forces and helping our cities cope with this. I would like to know her opinion as to why justice was left out of the throne speech.

Ms. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, justice has many definitions. What we have seen in the throne speech as an advancement of justice in terms of creating opportunities and preventative opportunities for young people from early childhood right through education. I do not accept that justice has been left out of the throne speech.

The Address

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to talk about the throne speech and aboriginal affairs today, but I would like to make reference to the last question and comment period.

Being from the province of British Columbia, we have had ongoing concern about grow operations, the production of B.C. bud as it is called. This has had a major impact on our economy and is something that the RCMP now described as an activity that is tearing at the social fabric of our province. We have had raids on our provincial legislature. We have had suggestions of some very criminal behaviour and money laundering reaching into the highest ranks of our provincial and/or our federal government representatives. All of this went completely unaddressed in the throne speech.

This is most inappropriate and is something that must be taken seriously by members of this government. Their behaviour, attitude and approach on this issue is the same as it is on the issue I wish to address today, which is aboriginal affairs. The government would rather bury problems and preserve the status quo than expose, fix and improve the agenda.

This would have major implications of course for the things Liberals pay lip service to in the throne speech and have paid lip service to every year dating back to the 1993 Liberal red book. That is children are to get a better start in life and the government will provide real economic opportunities, individuals will participate fully and we will have improved governance in first nation communities and so on.

The specificity is interesting. The attempt to say anything more than those nice words was much greater a year ago in the throne speech than it is this year. Even though this was touted as a throne speech where there would be a lot of attention paid to aboriginals, there are actually less specific commitments than there were one year ago, which was not considered to be a throne speech which paid attention to aboriginal issues.

As someone who has been in the aboriginal affairs portfolio for the official opposition during the period 1994 to 1997 and once again from June of last year, I have certainly seen my share of throne speeches. The very first throne speech I was present at and accounted for was in 1994 after the 1993 election. At that time the government made a commitment to turn over the Ipperwash site to the Kettle and Stoney Point Band.

That promise had far-reaching implications. DND was physically forced out by confrontation. We all know the story about Dudley George who was shot and killed by the Ontario Provincial Police. We know about the ongoing inquiry. Ten years later, this is all still going on. Throne speeches have important implications at times, and that was certainly something set in motion at that time.

• (1340)

The aboriginal section of the 1993 red book and this throne speech are somewhat similar. We have heard other members say this in their response to the throne speech. One of the statements in this throne speech is this one: "conditions in far too many Aboriginal communities can only be described as shameful". It states that we must "turn the corner" now.

If so, why is there such a lack of specifics, and why did the only specific measures create more bureaucracy? The government established an independent centre for first nations government and established a new cabinet committee on aboriginal affairs. This is continuing lip service to the 1993 commitments regarding transparency and accountability. These are nice sentiments, but what this throne speech does is create more bureaucracy. The taxpayer pays and the results remain the same. We have a lot of evidence of that, which I wish to talk to.

Despite the ongoing scandal at the Virginia Fontaine Addictions Foundation, which was first documented by Health Canada in a 1997 audit, the culture of massive financial abuse at the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada continues.

I have some very important things I would like to highlight from the recently released audit summary for the Virginia Fontaine centre at Sagkeeng First Nation. I wish to do that because it is a horrifying tale that makes one wonder if the federal government has any controls at all on behaviour, including the spending of millions of dollars of taxpayer funds that had been earmarked supposedly to improve aboriginal quality of life and other things that sound very nice, but which has led to enriching the few individuals involved in setting up what essentially amounted to a huge scam as opposed to something that was benefiting the people at large.

Here we have a centre that was audited in 1997, with major problems identified, and with which in 1999 the federal government entered into a new funding arrangement without fixing the old problems, with a set of directors that included three brothers and a daughter on a board of directors that included only three other individuals, one of whom for sure is a direct beneficiary of working as the chief financial officer. This was virtually a proprietary operation by a family, with Perry Fontaine in the chair; Keith Fontaine, the brother; Phil Fontaine, another brother; and Vera Bruyere, the daughter of Perry Fontaine, the chair.

• (1345)

What is most amazing is that we have an audit that has led to many charges by the RCMP, but this audit covers only the period from October 1, 1999, to February 28, 2002, while we know there were major problems identified in an earlier audit, not made public, dating to pre-1997. We know that 20 years of financial records were destroyed under the previous health minister, who is now conveniently no longer here, and under the previous deputy minister, who is now conveniently no longer here and has been appointed Governor of the Bank of Canada.

The suspicion is that tens of millions of dollars have basically gone AWOL and the government has no interest in exposing and fixing those problems because it does not believe it is in its best interests to do that. So far the only people who are being held accountable are not responsible bureaucrats. The only people being held accountable are bureaucrats who were on the take.

We have a corporate culture that entered into an agreement with a branch of Health Canada. The auditors speak in surgical, clinical language:

The management culture was dominated by Perry Fontaine with virtually no checks or restraints placed on his actions by the Board of Directors or other management.

The board in essence rubber-stamped Perry Fontaine's decisions. None of that should be a surprise, given the makeup of the board. The government officials had to have known the relationship of all of those people and they were flowing millions of dollars, close to \$12 million in this audit period alone, through that group.

Three major consultants were paid in this period of time. They were paid upfront and provided no invoices, and there is little or no evidence that they completed the services required under the contracts. These consultant contracts were managed, by their own admission, solely by Perry Fontaine, the chair of the board, so we had consultants in name only enriching the pockets of the chair of the board. In the case of one of the consulting contracts, its principal, Keith Fontaine, indicated he provided no services for many of the contracts and the funds flowed to his brother, Perry. The owner of one of the other consulting companies is Randall Fontaine, another brother. States the report, "The value of services received from [that contractor] is questionable". Those are the words the auditor used.

As I mentioned, \$12 million in federal funding flowed through in that short audit period alone. The tale of horrors continues. There were seven flowthrough arrangements from the federal government, five of which were with Health Canada.

Here are some of the other abuses. During October 1999 through October 2000, four trips were paid for by the foundation where Perry Fontaine, the chair, and Paul Cochrane, who is the Health Canada official purportedly in charge, and their families travelled together. A rather cozy, close relationship, I would say, and totally against Treasury Board guidelines.

• (1350)

These trips included trips to Florida, the Caribbean, Bermuda, San Juan and St. Maarten, at a cost of \$71,500. The cost related to the Health Canada bureaucrat, Mr. Cochrane, was \$11,000, and nothing was recorded as owing by him to the foundation at any time. There were further cruises after that period of time. There were four season's tickets to the Ottawa Senators and for selected concerts at the Corel Centre for a total value of \$63,000. Although these were in the name of Perry Fontaine, information obtained indicates these tickets were split with Paul Cochrane and delivered to Cochrane's house, and Paul Cochrane retained control of the tickets.

The cozy relationship continues. The approving federal bureaucrat and Mr. Cochrane's son confirmed that Perry Fontaine presented him and his girlfriend with an all-inclusive travel package to the Dominican Republic. The son was involved in the preparation of a proposal that resulted in a \$600,000 one time contribution from Health Canada to the foundation, approved by who else, Paul Cochrane, his father. The son was further rewarded with a 2000 Nissan Xterra, purchased new by Perry Fontaine in February 2000 and transferred to the son of Paul Cochrane in May 2000.

We have a statement that Perry Fontaine said he sold this and another vehicle to Paul Cochrane in return for two promissory notes totalling \$50,000, neither of which has been repaid. However, Mr. Fontaine declined to provide copies of the notes as he regards these

S. O. 31

transactions as personal. Mr. Cochrane confirmed that he did make this purchase but provided no details.

So suddenly public money becomes somebody's personal business and we have no way to get to the bottom of it. That displays to me that there is no interest on the part of the federal government when it transfers taxpayers' money in actually ensuring that it is able to be audited. This is a major problem and one we would identify and change. We are not going to allow personal agendas or abuses to manage the expenditure of public moneys.

There were further transactions entered into between the foundation and Perry Fontaine. The report states, "Given that Perry Fontaine was the decision maker for [the foundation], these agreements were effectively negotiated between Perry Fontaine and himself". And let me say they were very lucrative indeed for Mr. Fontaine.

During the period from September 1999 to February 2002, the foundation provided at least \$1,196,000 to Perry Fontaine through payments to him or on his behalf. Please note, the auditor points out, that Mr. Fontaine's company, O.A.G. Consultants, "also received another \$308,000 of Health Canada funding through payments from companies owned by his brother Keith...", and it goes on.

• (1355)

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CHELSEA AND COLE RODGERS

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today our community mourned the tragic loss of two young children in a fire last week. Hundreds of people from their home community of Michele Heights and from across Ottawa honoured Chelsea Rodgers and her little brother Cole.

Chelsea, age 10, was known for her unfailing kindness; Cole, age 7, for his impish sense of humour.

In the days since their tragic death, we have been reminded again of the importance of community as their neighbours, the whole city, voluntary organizations and their school rallied round to support the family.

Today especially, we wish to extend to the family our condolences and our sympathy, and for young Cole and Chelsea, our prayers.

* * *

EQUALIZATION PAYMENTS

Mr. Rex Barnes (Gander—Grand Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Constitution commits Parliament and the Government of Canada to make equalization payments that ensure provinces have significant revenue to provide reasonable levels of public service at reasonable levels of taxation.

S. O. 31

The current equalization system just does not work. Newfoundland and Labrador suffers greatly. The 5 province standard as opposed to the 10 province standard results in \$132 million less revenue for our province. Also, the Government of Canada claws back 81¢ of every new dollar earned on natural resources, while the province gets a mere 19¢ on every new resource dollar from offshore oil and gas development.

There are new economic realities facing provinces that require a new equalization system, one that is fairer. The new Prime Minister states his government is a new government with a new vision. Action is required now for the Prime Minister to reform the current equalization system.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Health Canada has developed a very welcome and new approach to the client consent initiative for the non-insured health benefits program after extensive consultations with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, first nations, clients and other stakeholders.

This new approach means that expressed consent is only required those clients where patient safety or inappropriate use may be a concern. Now, most clients of the program do not have to sign a form to continue to receive non-insured health benefits.

Expressed consent will be required when non-insured health benefits must share information with third parties. Health Canada will continue to accept signed forms as expressed consent and will also work to put in place appropriate protocols to accept consent verbally.

This new approach shows that Health Canada does listen to concerns voiced by their stakeholders while remaining committed to protecting privacy and patient safety.

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● (1400)

[*Translation*]**HEALTH**

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to a study by the Public Health Branch of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services on the health of young children in northern Quebec, the mortality rate of Inuit children under five years of age is five times higher than that of young Quebecers.

In Nunavik, many more newborns suffer from respiratory distress or serious hearing problems. Babies are born healthy; problems develop later. There are several theories about what causes respiratory problems, including the dryness of homes and the fact that so many people smoke.

According to Serge Déry, "The lack of housing in this area often results in three generations living under one roof. This not only promotes the spread of infection, but also other social problems".

During the winter months, in Nunavik, there are sometimes 16 to 18 Inuit living in a two-bedroom house.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year again, I am pleased to rise in the House to mark Black History Month.

February is the month when it is important for the entire black community in Canada and all Canadians to remember the sacrifices and contributions made by many others so we might enjoy our freedom today in Canada.

[*English*]

February is also a time to remember and highlight the importance of the black community in the evolution of Canadian society.

Since Mathieu Da Costa's arrival in Canada in 1605 as an interpreter, many black Canadians from all walks of life have marked the history of this country.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that Canadians like you and I and all of the other Canadians in this chamber will pause and remember their contribution during Black History Month.

* * *

JONATHAN DOCKMAN

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I pay tribute to an outstanding young man from my riding of Wild Rose.

Jonathan Dockman of Airdrie, Alberta is currently running across Canada to raise both funds and awareness for cancer. Last year his beloved aunt was diagnosed with an inoperable cancer and Jonathan was sparked into action.

Starting last August at the Atlantic Ocean, he has replicated the route Terry Fox attempted in 1981. He hopes to complete his journey this coming August in Victoria, having run over 5,500 miles. To date, he has endured hurricane Juan in Halifax and risked frostbite this past month with the frigid cold of the east.

Another individual who deserves a great deal of credit is his father, Mike, acting as Jonathan's support team. Each of these selfless individuals are simply great Canadians.

It is with pleasure, on behalf of the House, that I thank Jonathan for his courage and for trying to make a difference in the lives of so many. I want all members to join me in applauding his extraordinary efforts.

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[*Translation*]**INTER-PARLIAMENTARY FORUM OF THE AMERICAS**

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas was founded at a meeting held here in Ottawa in March 2001.

This association, known by its acronym FIPA, was founded to facilitate dialogue among the national congresses or parliaments of member countries, increase the sharing of experiences, and provide inter-parliamentary cooperation on issues of common interest.

Today, I have been given the privilege of being elected as a member of the international executive committee, and also chair of the Canadian section, thanks to the support of my colleagues in both houses of Parliament. I thank them most sincerely.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the hon. member for Don Valley West who presided so well over this organization and to wish him well in his role of Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister of Canada.

* * *

• (1405)

BAIE DES CHALEURS

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the Gaspé peninsula, a group of businesspeople and the Mi'kmaq community have begun a process intended to gain international recognition for the Baie des Chaleurs.

It was at the world congress of the Most Beautiful Bays in the World Club last June in Tadoussac that this group— whose name, Allaoleg, means “going somewhere”—decided that the Baie des Chaleurs should apply to join.

Some 30 bays in the world, including Tadoussac Bay in Quebec, are members of this very select club supported by Unesco.

The economic spinoffs from such a project are very significant.

I remind the house that the Fisheries Act allows for an intervention in order to shed light on the Bennett project at Belledune, on the shores of the Baie des Chaleurs. This only makes sense, as does recognizing the Baie des Chaleurs as one of the most beautiful bays in the world.

* * *

THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS

Mr. Gérard Binet (Frontenac—Mégantic, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take pride today in drawing attention to the extraordinary accomplishment of one of our fellow citizens.

Canadians are familiar with the film work of Denys Arcand, and have appreciated it for many years.

The fame of the most recent Arcand film, *The Barbarian Invasions*, has gone far beyond our own borders. After winning an award at the prestigious Cannes festival, it is now in U.S. theatres, and our neighbours to the south are discovering the incredible talent of this creative genius.

Following on its Golden Globe nomination, there is a definite interest in Mr. Arcand's film in the United States. It has two Academy Award nominations.

This government extends its congratulations to Denys Arcand for these richly deserved honours. I invite the House to join with me in wishing him the best of luck. Break a leg, as they say in the theatre.

S. O. 31

[English]

KELOWNA

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the devastating fires in Kelowna last summer confirmed that people even in distress and loss think of each other.

The Volunteer Firefighter T-shirt campaign sold 46,000 T-shirts, raising \$405,671. Yesterday, the Kelowna Volunteer Fire Department presented the cheque to the Kelowna and Area Okanagan Fire Recovery Society.

This year's efforts by the United Way raised a record breaking \$1,010,000 in local fundraising. Our thanks to outgoing chairman Mel Kotler and his team for all their efforts on behalf of the community.

It is a great source of pride that we were able to come through the fires a stronger, more caring and generous community. Many thanks to all, but especially to those who have given though they too have suffered loss.

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ARTS AND CULTURE

Ms. Sarmite Bulte (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, January 20, 2004, the Canadian Stage Company launched the international tour of the *The Overcoat* to thunderous applause in the United Kingdom at London's prestigious Barbican Theatre.

The CanStage production of *The Overcoat* was created by Morris Panych and Wendy Gorling and is one of the largest touring productions in Canadian theatre history.

In March 2004 the production will travel to Australia and New Zealand. This touring presentation has been made possible through the generous support of *inter alia*: the Canada Council for the Arts, the Department of Canadian Heritage through the trade routes program, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade through the performing arts program.

Based in Toronto, CanStage is one of the largest not-for-profit theatre companies in Canada and developing an international presence as an exporter of theatrical productions is a keystone of CanStage's strategy.

I wish to congratulate CanStage on this ambitious project and for promoting Canadian works, Canadian creators and Canadian performers internationally.

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AFRICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to announce to the House that February is African Heritage Month.

S. O. 31

Nova Scotia has one of the largest and proudest black communities in all of Canada. We are very proud to stand in the House today and remember the great artists, Portia White, Jeremiah Sparks, and of course Nova Scotia's idol, Mr. Gary Beals. Of course, in the political world, Mr. Wayne Adams was the first black man to be elected into the legislature and Yvonne Atwell was the first black woman to be elected to the provincial legislature. Who could forget the great work that Gordon Earle did, the first black member of Parliament from Nova Scotia, in the House of Commons between 1997 and 2000? There is also Senator Donald Oliver.

There are also other fantastic people in the world of sports, including Kirk Johnson and Ray Downey. In the area of civil rights we have Dr. Ruth Johnson and of course, the historic and valuable Calvin Ruck.

On behalf of the New Democratic Party and my colleagues in the House of Commons, we recognize the initiatives and efforts of black people throughout Canada. We wish them a very happy and successful month.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, suicide remains a taboo subject, despite the size of the problem. Every year in Quebec, close to 1,500 lives are lost, the equivalent of a Titanic disaster. There are also close to 29,000 suicide attempts.

On the occasion of national suicide prevention week, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of thousands of paid and volunteer workers throughout Quebec, but particularly those of Richard Lavoie. He is the man behind a consciousness-raising walk, the "Marche Québec-Amérique".

During the summer of 2003, Mr. Lavoie covered more than 1,000 km raising public awareness of suicide among young people. He attracted audiences by stopping in a number of towns where he organized percussion performances. I had the pleasure of welcoming him to Saint-Hyacinthe and taking part in one of these performances.

He has also written a book, entitled *La prévention du suicide est malade*, in which he tells the story of his three months of travel and shares his feelings on this issue and on the shortcomings in the way it has been handled in the past 10 years.

To Richard Lavoie, his partner Manon, and daughters Allison and Stéphanie, as well as all the volunteers who made these public awareness efforts possible, my thanks and congratulations.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

ENTERPRISE CAPE BRETON CORPORATION

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I want to offer my congratulations to Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation. Last month the Auditor General's awards for excellence in annual reporting were announced and ECBC was one of this year's finalists.

This corporation's work in Cape Breton is well known as it has delivered important projects to every part of Cape Breton Island. Today there are thousands of people working in my riding who are working because of the efforts of ECBC.

The Auditor General stated in announcing her awards that the awards recognize the best reporting practices in crown corporations' annual reports. It is an honour that ECBC was considered, but the award that really matters is the economic contribution ECBC has made to the people of Cape Breton.

Today I extend my best wishes to the board of directors, to vice-president Rick Beaton and to the staff of this vital corporation for this significant recognition.

* * *

CANADIAN LIGHT SOURCE

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in December scientists at the University of Saskatchewan's national synchrotron facility were basking in the glow of a tiny, yet very significant, dot of light, the first visible light captured by the Canadian light source, one of the most advanced synchrotrons in the world and the only one in Canada.

Referred to as the Swiss knife of science, intense synchrotron light acts like a supermicroscope, allowing researchers to probe the very structure of matter and to analyze physical, chemical, geological and biological processes. The potential for application of this research is tremendous.

CLS has positioned not just Saskatoon but Canada on the cutting edge of science and will serve as a magnet for top researchers. Testing of the first suite of beam lines is currently underway and routine operations are set to begin this fall.

Congratulations to the University of Saskatchewan and the CLS team. Once again we see the true bright lights are not in the benches of government, but at home in Saskatchewan.

* * *

[Translation]

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Diane St-Jacques (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague, the Minister of State for Financial Institutions, for the emphasis placed on the regions recently.

He has already visited several regions and will continue to do so until next week, as part of the prebudget consultations. Tomorrow, I will be in Bromont with the minister and representatives from my riding of Shefford and representatives from Brome—Missisquoi.

People from all walks of life, all social, economic and community backgrounds, have had and will have the opportunity to express their vision for the future.

The regions are of the utmost importance in ensuring the economic, social and cultural viability of Canada.

Canadians from the regions have shared their priorities for economic and social renewal and, as mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada will follow through.

Oral Questions

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this month the volunteer driven First Nations Accountability Coalition, founded in 1995, is holding 13 meetings across Canada on corrupt electoral practices and how to remove leadership from office. This is a tall order because the Indian Act does not promote democracy or accountability and government prefers the status quo.

Compare the coalition of volunteers' tireless efforts with government actions.

The First Nations and Inuit Branch of Health Canada is involved in an ongoing major scandal involving millions of dollars for the Virginia Fontaine Treatment Centre. Now we discover the government rewarded Grand Chief Phil Fontaine with an appointment to the Indian Claims Commission at \$250,000 per year, plus an unaccountable per diem of \$175.

Taxpayers and ordinary reserve residents are not impressed. Canadians deserve better.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN ECONOMY

Mr. Christian Jobin (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after a very trying year on many levels, what with SARS, the discovery of a case of mad cow, and the big blackout, the Canadian economy seems to be on the verge of a much-hoped-for recovery.

Yesterday, Statistics Canada revealed the results of its Business Conditions Survey. It shows that Canadian manufacturing companies are cautiously optimistic about the outlook for this first quarter.

The balance of opinion with respect to orders is very positive. The number of manufacturing companies that are posting an increase in orders has risen by 4% since October, for a total of 24%.

This is the highest positive balance since April 2000. This government will continue to ensure an economic climate that will allow Canadian companies to offer quality jobs to Canadians.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

• (1415)

[English]

CANADA STEAMSHIP LINES

Mr. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister admitted that he knew the \$137,000 government figure was wrong. In fact, he knew it was wrong for about 10 months. He says he was powerless to do anything about it, but that frankly is wrong. He was a member of Parliament and he had vocal cords. Why did he not just speak up and say that there was a big problem with that number?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as soon as I was in a position to do something, I pushed immediately to

have a complete exposition of all of the numbers. As a result of that, the most comprehensive set of numbers probably of any set of contracts has been prepared by the government. I did so immediately I was in a position to do so.

Mr. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is it about being a member of Parliament that did not give him the position to do so?

Here is the timeline: In October 2002 we asked the question; in February 2003 the answer came back and that answer was wrong. The Prime Minister said he did not act because he was otherwise engaged. It took 10 months for the information to get from his ear to his heart.

Why did it take so long for the Prime Minister to tell right from wrong?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all let us understand that what we are talking about is the compilation of the numbers. The fact is that an enormous amount of information about the numbers was on the Public Works' website and had been there for a long period of time. The real fact of the matter is that a lot of that information was incredibly ancient because it went back to a period before I even entered cabinet.

Mr. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here are the latest excuses from a long line of them: (a) the PM was too busy; (b) he was not in charge of the company any longer; and (c) he was not PM yet. Which excuse will it be today, (a), (b), (c), or all of the above?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to openness and transparency. The real issue before the House is, why is the opposition afraid of the results that will come forth from the Auditor General? Why is the opposition afraid that the Auditor General will in fact look at these numbers and take up the examination?

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's dealings with CSL are becoming well documented. In 1996 he met with the ethics counsellor and the president of CSL to discuss a lucrative deal with an Indonesian power company, Jawa Power. CSL has refused to say just how lucrative that contract was.

When will the Prime Minister provide Canadians with all the information about his share of the CSL take and give Canadians their share of the tax?

[Translation]

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to this question and the previous one, I took office on December 12; in six weeks, we compiled more than 250 pages of documents, which have been posted on the website with all the details.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced that the Auditor General was going to look into the matter. They rejected this for one simple reason: truth and facts do not interest them; they are only interested in politics.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, CPC): It may be politics, Mr. Speaker, but the House leader should know that it is his job to provide accurate information to the opposition and Canadians.

The Prime Minister surely wants to avoid being put in the same category as Italian leader Silvio Berlusconi whose business dealings have damaged his reputation.

In the interest of openness, transparency and trust, will the Prime Minister agree that the Auditor General's investigation into the financial dealings include the examination of his business connections to the former Indonesian dictator Suharto's family?

• (1420)

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we talk about honouring integrity and transparency, I think my colleague should not have cited Mr. Berlusconi. He should have cited Mr. Orchard.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister boasts about being the biggest fighter of tax havens on earth. This is mind-boggling. Not only did the Prime Minister sponsor Bill C-28 and maintain the treaty with Barbados, but, on four occasions, he ignored the Auditor General's recommendations for tighter controls. The result: his company, CSL International, headquartered in Barbados, saved \$100 million in taxes.

Will the Prime Minister, who is clearly in conflict of interest, admit that his fine speech on tax havens should be entitled, "Do as I say, not as I do"?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the opposition members continue to string this long line of fabrication. The \$100 million figure is entirely a figment of their imagination.

The facts are that we are determined to get fair share of tax revenues for Canadians. I have said in the House before that that is one of the principal objectives of our international tax treaties. We have those under review, as have a number of countries, including the United States.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are prepared to debate the \$100 million at any time. Let him open the books, and we will.

The Prime Minister is saying that he worked at the international level with regard to tax havens. It is true. He worked with other countries to ensure that Barbados, one of the main tax havens, no longer appears on the OECD's list. That is what he did to save face. In that country, the tax rate is 2.5% for \$1 million. That is what he did. He would have paid a great deal more here, as he well knows. It is to save face. That is what his great international initiative was all about.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as finance minister, I was the one who brought the matter of tax havens to the G-7. Under Canada's leadership, the G-7 took this matter to the OECD. There was a monumental study. There was a problem with the Europeans, but Canada said that tax havens needed to be eliminated to ensure international equity. I said it here in the House, I said it on the international scene, and I will continue to say it.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance stated yesterday, and I quote, "there is no link between CSL moving to Barbados, the legislation and the tax conventions signed by Canada".

How can the finance minister make such a ridiculous statement to try and save the Prime Minister's skin, when the first vice president of CSL, Pierre Préfontaine, declared on February 1, 2003, that CSL International had moved from Liberia to Barbados precisely because of changes in Canadian tax rules?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the question yesterday asked if we had changed the rules to benefit CSL. The answer is no.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only did Bill C-28 give a direct advantage to the Prime Minister's company, but the tax convention with Barbados, which he chose to uphold while he was finance minister, was also beneficial to CSL International.

Is the Minister of Finance prepared to admit that the tax convention enabled the Prime Minister to bring back to Canada capital on which he paid just over 1% in taxes in Barbados instead of the Canadian rate, which is 37%? That is a \$100 million profit in the Prime Minister's pockets.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of international tax treaties is to ensure that on a global basis international corporations pay their full and fair share of tax.

In the case of international shipping companies, they earn their revenue clearly in a place where it is not possible to tax and that is on the high seas. Therefore we have tax treaties to make sure the tax can be collected in a fair way. It is necessary to review those treaties on an ongoing basis to make sure they are fair. The United States is doing that and so is Canada.

* * *

• (1425)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

The Liberals have attacked the NDP for saying missile defence will weaponize space and, therefore, constitute star wars.

Here is what Lieutenant-General Ronald Kadish, director of the missile defence agency, told the Senate armed services committee, "There will be at least 300 space-based interceptors".

In light of these comments, I wonder how the Prime Minister can cling to the absolute fiction that missile defence is not star wars.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the government is in the process of doing is gathering information. That is why in fact the letters were exchanged between the Minister of National Defence and the United States. We are gathering information.

Canada has made it very clear that we do not support the weaponization of space. We will not participate if in fact what is happening is the weaponization of space.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the information does not need to be gathered. It is plainly on the record in the United States. The Prime Minister seems to be as good at avoiding the truth on star wars as he is at avoiding taxes in the Barbados.

I want to say again, Paul Wolfowitz said:

Space is the ultimate high ground. We are exploring concepts and technologies for space-based intercepts.

In the 2005 U.S. federal government estimates, they mention, and I quote, "Space-based interceptor test bed...beginning in 2005".

This plan is dangerous and destabilizing. It does not reflect Canadian values. Why is the Prime Minister afraid to say no to George Bush now?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said, and the government has been very clear, we are presently trying to find out from the United States about a plan, which it intends to proceed with, that deals with the defence of North America from ballistic missiles based on land and on sea.

This issue has nothing to do with going into space. There is a lot of speculation about going into space. A lot of people are talking about it. The present plan has nothing to do with the weaponization of space. We have made it clear that we will not engage in discussions with the United States that will lead to the weaponization of space, as the Prime Minister has said. What we do want to find out is if we can help the security of North America for Canadians.

* * *

CANADA STEAMSHIP LINES

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claims that he did not know the government had misrepresented, in February 2003, the public contracts with his company.

When he was asked about the massive \$161 million error last week, he said that he was "appalled" when he saw what the original answer had been.

The question is very simple. On what date did the Prime Minister become aware of the \$137,000 figure that the government released in February 2003?

[Translation]

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the important date is the date on which I

published the report. The report was published on January 28, as a result of the work I had done all through January this year. It is perfectly clear. Let us not blame other people for what they should not have or could not have done. I was the person responsible for it. I published that quite clearly. The rest is of no significance whatever.

[English]

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question is for the Prime Minister. It is about getting to the facts of the matter.

We submitted a question in October 2003. The answer provided in February 2003 was \$137,000. The next answer, provided a year later, was \$161 million.

We want to know when the Prime Minister became aware of this and why he failed to take action immediately to correct this gross error by the government.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the first part of that question has already been answered a number of times.

What is really important is that as soon as I was in a position, along with the House leader, to take action, I took action.

The hon. member will know that I was out of cabinet and not exactly in a position of power to do very much at that time. As soon as I was in a position to act, along with the House leader, the government acted.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Stelco is in big financial trouble and is seeking help from the Prime Minister but Stelco is also one of the major clients of CSL, the Prime Minister's family business.

The Prime Minister says that he wants to build confidence in government. How will the Prime Minister avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest when CSL customers arrive in his office looking for cash?

● (1430)

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the Department of Industry that is in contact directly with Stelco. It is an unfortunate situation that we have right now with Stelco. We are monitoring the situation very closely and we hope the fact that it is under the CCAA will bring a solution to the problem it is having.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it will be pretty hard for the industry minister to forget that the Prime Minister's family owns CSL.

The fact that the Prime Minister's family's holdings touch almost every government causes a lot of problems.

How can the Prime Minister run a country when he has to run away from the cabinet table every five minutes to avoid a conflict of interest?

Oral Questions

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is not in a conflict of interest right now. Stelco did not ask anything from our Prime Minister.

The contacts right now are with my department, with my deputy minister and with my assistant deputy minister. We will meet with our provincial colleagues to monitor the situation very closely. There is no problem about being there right now to help Stelco with the difficult situation it is having.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA STEAMSHIP LINES

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-28, which made it possible for the Prime Minister's company to save some \$100 million in taxes, was his second attempt at avoiding taxes. On December 2, 1996, while he was the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister introduced Bill C-69, with exactly the same objectives. It died on the Order Paper because of the subsequent general election.

Are not these two attempts by the Prime Minister proof that this was a wholly premeditated and planned act, and that he was fully aware of all of the consequences?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the amendments proposed in Bill C-28 concerning international shipping clarify the rules designed to encourage foreign shipping to do business in Canada.

They do not apply to companies incorporated in Canada, or to foreign subsidiaries administered elsewhere.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear for the sake of everyone listening. Eight shipping companies benefited from this legislation, including the Prime Minister's, which was also the largest. Those are the facts. The Prime Minister missed his chance with Bill C-69, so he came back two years later with Bill C-28.

Is it not true that the Prime Minister did not want to lose one cent of the \$100 million in tax savings, since he included a four-year retroactive period in Bill C-28? He wanted to be sure not to lose a single cent of that \$100 million.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, repeating a falsehood does not make it true. What we have here is an incoherent babble of allegations from the Bloc members in an obvious attempt to try to smear the Prime Minister because they cannot lay a glove on him in any other manner.

Bill C-28 simply was not relevant to CSL and, even more important, the then finance minister had absolutely nothing to do with the shipping provisions contained in that piece of legislation.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what I would like to understand then is why CSL Vice-President Préfontaine tells us he moved to Barbados because of the changes to

Canadian tax rules, while the spokesperson for Canada Steamship Lines tells us that Canada Steamship Lines International would never have made such profits in Canada. She described Canadian taxes as too high. "Subsidies and contracts are good, but the taxes are too high", she said. According to the Prime Minister, they had to do the same as everybody else if they wanted to make any money.

So let him explain that to us, if it really made no difference.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again this attack from the Bloc is absolutely ludicrous. The Government of Canada has not now nor during the last term of the government engaged in any conduct that was deliberately contrived to assist any particular company. Not at all. The allegations to the contrary are completely spurious.

• (1435)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely incorrect. It is an attempt to shirk responsibility. Changing the rules for shipping companies means changing the rules for shipping companies.

When Canada Steamship Lines International, now headquartered in Barbados—where the tax rate is roughly 2.5% for the first few million, compared to 37% here—suddenly moves from Liberia to Barbados and then the legislation changes twice, what is that called? It is called taking care of one's own business by using one's position. That is what it is called.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all these allegations were examined, both in the House and in committee. I refer the House to the records of February 17, 1998 that completely demonstrate the facts of this matter. The allegations are totally spurious. Bill C-28 had absolutely nothing to do with Canada Steamship Lines. Furthermore, the then finance minister had nothing to do with drafting the provisions in Bill C-28 that related to international shipping.

What we have here, if this were a hockey game, is the Prime Minister as the hockey star and those across the way trying to cross—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Fraser Valley.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, in a CBC interview, was quoted as saying, "To deal with the whole issue of tax havens, you can't cherry-pick. You have to deal with them all at once, otherwise people have many options and they'll just go to one or the other. Closing down one doesn't do any good".

Why did the Prime Minister not close all the loopholes and why does his family's company still use the loopholes that allow it to escape paying Canadian tax?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister launched a number of initiatives in the 1990s to try to deal with the issue of tax havens, as he has described both in this House and outside.

Oral Questions

At the same time, the OECD launched an initiative that was aimed at trying to deal with this on a global basis. We had hoped that the OECD would be able to deal with it comprehensively. Unfortunately, it appears that the OECD initiative has faltered. Therefore, Canada and a number of other countries are looking at what we can do on a country by country basis to ensure that everybody pays their full fair share of tax.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, whether they are looking at it country by country or company by company, it is obviously a pretty sweet deal for those who can take advantage of it.

Again, the Prime Minister said, only a year ago, that we had to deal with all these tax havens at once, otherwise people would have many options and they would just go from one to the other. Closing down one does not do any good. That is pretty clear.

What has changed since April of last year? Why does the loophole stay open for the Prime Minister's shipping company?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is required here is an international consensus, which we had hoped the OECD would be able to achieve, following upon some of the initiatives that were launched by the Prime Minister when he was Minister of Finance. Unfortunately, the OECD was not successful in its initiative. It appears to have faltered.

Therefore, on a country by country basis, we need to look at this whole situation, which I said several days ago in this House that we were doing, to attempt to renegotiate, where appropriate, these tax treaties.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the average Canadian works half the year to pay off their taxes. Between income taxes, payroll taxes and the GST, up to 48% of income is eaten away by the tax man. By contrast, through the generous use of a Barbados tax haven the Prime Minister created while he was finance minister, his former company Canada Steamship Lines pays only 2% of its income toward taxes.

Will the Prime Minister please explain to the Canadian public why they should pay half of their income to taxes and his company can sail away, scot free?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I think the hon. gentlemen is referring to a study that was done by the Fraser Institute that included a rather kitchen sink analysis of taxes. I would point out that there were not only federal taxes but provincial and all sorts of fees and charges of every description whatsoever. Therefore, there is some question about the study to which he refers.

On the issue of tax fairness, the Government of Canada is determined to achieve tax fairness, both domestically and internationally. If that requires some renegotiation of international tax treaties, that in fact will be done.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is tough to take the government's information seriously, especially when it seems to be right only 2% of the time.

As finance minister, this man put in place laws to benefit great shipping magnates of Canada, of which he happened to be the biggest. In the meantime, he raised taxes on Canadians to pay for

numerous scandals he oversaw, like the gun registry and advertising contracts.

How is it fair that the Prime Minister thinks he deserves to get away with not paying his fair share in taxes, while the people of Canada struggle to make ends meet?

• (1440)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again the hon. gentleman repeats a false allegation. In his question is embedded the assertion that Bill C-28 benefited firms to which the Prime Minister was related.

The fact of the matter is that Bill C-28 was not pertinent at all to CSL. It was pertinent to other international shipping companies to try to attract foreign companies to base their operations in Canada, but it had nothing to do with CSL.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. Is the minister going to introduce a bill next week in this House based on the former Bill C-53 to change the name of certain ridings? For instance, Nunavik—Eeyou would become Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou in April 2004.

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to congratulate my colleague for his determination in fighting for the names. I must say that many MPs are affected by this legislation. All MPs affected by the changes have been contacted individually.

We are going to reintroduce Bill C-53. The effective date will be different for obvious reasons. The bill will indeed be reintroduced. I can confirm that for my colleague.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is putting Canada on a dangerous track with this commitment to a star wars scheme.

I have a very simple question for him. If this missile defence program is such a good idea, why was it not included in the throne speech? Is it because the Prime Minister likes to sing with Bono but prefers to dance with Bush?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we cannot include all the negotiations and dances in the Speech from the Throne. The purpose of the throne speech is to show Canadians the direction that this government intends to take and, like all my colleagues on this side of the House, I am proud of that direction.

As for a star wars scheme, it is a figment of the imagination of members opposite, not a reality in our negotiations with the United States.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is clear the government does not want Canadians to know about star wars, so I will not even bother asking the Prime Minister what he thinks about the Bush government actively considering nuclear tips on interceptor missiles.

I will ask why the Prime Minister is so anxious to join star wars supposedly to protect us from North Korea when the government will do nothing to protect Song Dae Ri from North Korea? Why not let him stay in Canada?

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the IRB has a very difficult job. It reviews thousands of heart-rending cases every year. This is just one example of another one.

There are many avenues of appeal in our immigration refugee system. My understanding is that the individual referred to has put one of the options in place through a humanitarian and compassionate grounds appeal. I will be reviewing that.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's throne speech outlined his own personal big spend agenda using everybody else's taxes. I know he will lose tax dollars from our livestock industry after his government finishes driving it into bankruptcy. That is a \$30 billion industry supplying 225,000 jobs in this country, yet the Prime Minister and the finance minister continue to ignore the industry to death.

Is it because there is no political gain in rural Canada for these Liberals? Is that why?

Hon. Bob Speller (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to thank all hon. members who last night participated in a take note debate. I thought all hon. members gave the Government of Canada a lot of information that we needed and we will use in terms of our deliberations.

As the hon. member knows, and as I said last night, the Government of Canada has responded in a couple of different areas. First and foremost in terms of marketing Canadian beef, and second, looking after those Canadian farmers and farm families with programs to ensure there are dollars in their hands to help with the impact that BSE is having on them.

• (1445)

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there we go again hearing the same old platitudes and promises that we heard last night. It is all retroactive. There is no proactivity in the government's programs at all. Nothing gets delivered to the farm gate.

Producers, and that is their advocate over there, wonder if it is because the new agriculture minister is not up to the job. He is not pounding on the cabinet table. He is not getting their attention. There are no dollars flowing. That guy is so laid back he makes Rip Van Winkle look like a disco dancer.

Why has the minister not convinced his cabinet colleagues that there is a severe crisis out there?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member may know, over the course of the last two to three months I have met with the cattle industry in Saskatchewan, I have met with the cattle industry in Ontario, I have met with it in Quebec and I have done so in Alberta.

There is one consistent theme and that is praise for this Minister of Agriculture who went to Japan and Korea and who was on the job in Alberta and in Saskatchewan. Unanimously, the cattle industry has praised him for the job that he has done.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite the Prime Minister now admitting that our armed forces are, and I quote, "stretched very thin", last night on CBC television he announced he intends to leave 500 of our Canadian troops behind in Afghanistan after the current mission ends in August. Rotations home have been put off and training has been delayed. Our troops need a break, and until last night, the Prime Minister indicated he would give them one.

Why do our soldiers and their families have to stay glued to their television sets to learn if and when the Prime Minister intends to send them overseas?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that our troops are stretched thin and there is no doubt that they have to come back. At the same time, there are other jobs and other vocations which certain of our troops can fill that would not interfere with their rotation and would not in fact lead to stretching them even more thinly.

Under those circumstances, the Government of Canada has said that up to 500, not more, could remain or could be rotated back if the jobs they were required to perform would not stretch them too thinly.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night on CBC television there were no "ifs, ands and coulds", it was that the Prime Minister was committing us to doing that.

The Prime Minister's word is not even any good for one day. Yesterday in the House of Commons the Prime Minister committed to increased debate in Parliament and more power to individual MPs, yet last night, just like Jean Chrétien, he could not resist making a major announcement on the television instead of here in Parliament.

Why has the Prime Minister put the desire for a positive photo op ahead of the needs of our troops?

Hon. David Price (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the answer is there. The Prime Minister has been very clear in his answer.

We are very proud of the work that our troops have been doing. They are doing an excellent job. They will continue to do that, and we must not forget that we are in command of that NATO operation until the end of the year.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

SOCIAL PROGRAMS

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the former minister of intergovernmental affairs finally recognized that, as regards the issue of parental leave, the federal government was on slippery ground because of the Constitution.

Is the government prepared to announce that it will not appeal the ruling on parental leave and that it will recognize Quebec's jurisdiction in this area?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were very clear on this issue. We are reviewing the court ruling, its impact and the steps that we will take. We have not ruled out anything.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister who addresses Quebecers in French is saying that the federal government is prepared to negotiate. However, in order to negotiate in good faith, one must respect the ruling made, which clearly states that the federal government is interfering in Quebec's jurisdiction. This is the basis of any negotiation.

Consequently, will the Prime Minister confirm that he will not appeal the decision on parental leave and that he will begin negotiating in good faith with Quebec at the earliest opportunity?

• (1450)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce to the House and to members from all parties that we have already begun the process with our Quebec counterparts. We have already set a date to begin our discussions. Let us wait to see the outcome of these initial discussions.

* * *

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Veterans Affairs has extended the VIP coverage to those widows whose veteran husbands died after September 1, 1990. I cannot believe that anyone sitting in the House does not want to treat those veterans' widows. While this change increased the number of widows who receive coverage, it did not extend the VIP benefits to all our veterans' widows.

We now have two classes of widows, some covered and many not, simply on the basis of when—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my predecessor in this position laboured long and hard and successfully to improve upon the legislation enacted by the then Tory government of Brian Mulroney in 1990. That legislation extended benefits to widows of veterans but cut them off after one year.

This government, thanks to the work of my predecessor and with the full support of veterans' associations, improved upon that such

that all these veterans' widows were covered for life, resulting in 10,000 more being covered at an additional cost of \$200 million.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs should just think about this. The wives of all those veterans who died before September 1, 1990 are home. I hear from them every day. They say, "Please, please I can't stay in my home unless I get that VIP".

When will the government, when will the minister, get up in the House and say that all veterans' widows are equal? Will it be today or will it be tomorrow?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, the government was faced with a situation of veterans' widows being cut off within one year of the death of their husbands. After much labour and with the full support of the veterans' groups and with the support of the House, we succeeded in extending this care for life. There are, as a consequence, more than 10,000 additional beneficiaries at a cost to the government of \$238 million over five years.

There is no doubt that this move represented a very substantial improvement over the legislation introduced by the member's party back in 1990.

* * *

STATISTICS CANADA

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for Statistics Canada. Currently information from Statistics Canada on Cambridge is lumped under the confusing heading of Kitchener Census Metropolitan Area.

Could the Minister of Industry tell us what changes can be made to better reflect the presence of Cambridge?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from for Cambridge for that question. I do understand his frustration when the City of Cambridge is not mentioned in the census metropolitan area when the information is released.

I have to say that the convention is based on the fact that the name is based on the largest municipality or the central municipality. Nevertheless, I will ask Statistics Canada to make some effort when it releases information to include references to all municipalities included in the CMA.

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FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has already broken his promise that he made on national television only last night.

He said one of the most important democratic reforms is to give MPs more power to represent their constituents, but now he announces there will not be a free vote on the gun registry. The Prime Minister's words and his actions just do not line up.

Oral Questions

An Ipsos-Reid poll this week tells us that only 43% of Canadians support the gun registry. Will the Prime Minister allow a free vote on the firearms fiasco or will he not?

• (1455)

[Translation]

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thought that the plan of action was very clear. Votes concerning the throne speech, basic policy and budget matters are traditionally confidence votes. Therefore, it will be a whipped vote, as usual.

[English]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): The fact is he broke his promise in less than 24 hours.

The Liberals' 1993 red book made no mention of a universal firearms registry. When the man who wrote the red book became finance minister, he wrote most of the cheques for this billion dollar boondoggle.

The Prime Minister made national news once again about how all of his programs are going to pass seven tests. The gun registry fails all seven of the Prime Minister's expenditure review tests. It fails all seven and again he says one thing but he does another. Why is he just reviewing this firearms fiasco instead of scrapping it?

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Associate Minister of National Defence and Minister of State (Civil Preparedness), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's review of the gun registry is about building a better gun system. With this registry, gun advocates will ensure that they have a sustainable system and owners of guns can expect a system that listens to their legitimate concerns.

* * *

[Translation]

OIL INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the refineries contribute to the rising price of gasoline by decreasing their production, creating an artificial shortage. One trucking association, l'Association du camionnage du Québec, had this to say:

that someone will have to absorb these additional costs, and it may well be our customers, while the oil industry gets off lightly.

Truck drivers are carrying the whole load and the consumer may once again be held hostage by the oil industry.

What will it take for the Minister of Industry to create a petroleum monitoring agency, as recommended in the report of the Standing Committee on Industry? That is the watchdog we need.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am aware of the frustration that consumers and, of course, the trucking association feel regarding the fluctuating price of gasoline.

It is very clear that the Competition Bureau has already examined this issue. It can do so again, if it believes there is illegal behaviour in today's market, which is far from private. And meanwhile, I think

the hon. member knows that the provinces, including Quebec, could certainly look into what could be done from their side.

* * *

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, given that Canadian farmers' groups, including the National Farmers Union and the Canadian Wheat Board, oppose the release of Monsanto's genetically modified wheat variety because of a potential loss of premium markets, does the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food intend to turn down Monsanto's application?

Hon. Bob Speller (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his interest in Canadian farmers and farm families. As the hon. member should know, the Government of Canada has a science based regulatory system which assures Canadian consumers and world markets that in fact the food they eat is not only some of the highest quality but some of the safest food in the world.

An environmental assessment is a key component of this. The hon. member can be assured that nothing will go on the market until it is first studied in terms of its environmental impact, its impact on animal feed and also its impact on—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Champlain.

* * *

[Translation]

GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Social Development boasted about seniors' improved quality of life and attributed this progress to the efforts of the former finance minister and current Prime Minister.

It would be interesting if the Prime Minister, the former finance minister, explained to seniors why he granted retroactivity to his own company in Barbados, when he is denying them retroactive GIS payments they are entitled to?

• (1500)

Hon. Liza Frulla (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we need to rewind a bit. In 2002, a wide-scale awareness campaign was conducted to assist seniors and tell them about the income supplement.

Today, 1.4 million seniors receive the guaranteed income supplement, for a total of \$5 billion. Obviously, we are trying to reach as many seniors as possible, to ensure they receive what they are entitled to.

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Dr. Lyle Oberg, Minister of Learning of Alberta, and the Honourable Mark Norris, Minister of Economic Development of Alberta.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the persons appearing on the poster in honour of this year's Black History Month as well as the artist who created the poster: Zanana Akande, Dwight Drummond, and Ian Jones.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want to ask the government House leader what he has planned for the rest of today, tomorrow and early next week.

I would also like to ask him if he has reconsidered my request of January 23 to dispense with our break during the month of March so we could continue the business of the House. That request, as you know, Mr. Speaker, was supported by the House leaders of the other parties.

Furthermore, I would ask him if he plans to have a further debate on BSE, because last night I believe the debate was exceptionally good, but so many members who wanted to speak of course could not get on the record because of the timeframe. I wonder if he plans to continue with perhaps a special debate, maybe during regular sitting hours when the issue can get the prominence it deserves.

[Translation]

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that, this afternoon, we will resume debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Tomorrow, we will begin consideration of the motion in my name on the process to reinstate the bills from the last session. Given that this is a procedural motion, I hope it can be dealt with quickly.

If that is the case, we will consider a motion for referral to committee before the second reading of the bill introduced this morning to amend the Radiocommunication Act.

If the debate on the reinstatement motion is not concluded tomorrow, the House will resume consideration of this motion until it is concluded. We will then return to the debate on the Address.

This work will take us to the middle of next week by which time the government will have introduced bills that the House will want to consider quickly, given their urgency.

I am glad my colleague made reference to last night's take note debate. We can look into the possibilities, if we need to have another debate on this issue or perhaps continue the take note debate.

The Address

With respect to break week, I already asked my colleague in no uncertain terms to consider sitting later into the evenings, if necessary, to be sure to accomplish everything that needs to get done. Depending on one's view, he pleasantly or unpleasantly declined.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in question period I asked a question of the President of the Treasury Board about an issue with respect to my riding. I was trying to do my job to correct an inequality situation. Today, just before question period, the President of the Treasury Board called me to try to explain his convoluted answer that he gave me yesterday. In the middle of the conversation, he slammed the phone down and hung up on me because I did not agree with his answer.

This is not helping me do my job. I wish the Speaker would instruct the President of the Treasury Board to not be rude and disrespectful to members and to call me and have a discussion about this issue, which is an equality issue with respect to all of Atlantic Canada. It certainly does not follow in the Prime Minister's new concept of democratic reform. I think an apology is due, and a phone call to restart this conversation. We will finish it and I will have my say, with not just him having his say.

● (1505)

The Speaker: I appreciate the hon. member's enthusiasm for having discussions with ministers about subjects of concern to his constituents. We all enjoy that opportunity. All of us do not get through to the President of the Treasury Board every time we try, I am sure, but we do often make that effort.

While I am sure the hon. member has a grievance, he must know that the Speaker does not control the actions of members outside the House. He could not have made the call from in here because that would have been contrary to the rules and so I am stuck.

The hon. member I am sure will have a chat with the President of the Treasury Board at his convenience and patch up relations to the extent necessary to enable him to discharge his duties as a member of Parliament for his constituency. I know that the President of the Treasury Board will be enthusiastic at the prospect of more discussions with the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, and of the amendment.

The Address

The Speaker: When the House broke for question period, I believe the hon. member for Vancouver Island North had completed his remarks. It is now time for questions and comments on the speech given by the hon. member.

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague who actually got into a subject and an issue that is very important. It has gone on for a decade or more. I am referring to the Virginia Fontaine Addictions Foundation and the corruption that has happened due to the misuse of dollars. I believe there are three different ministers who have been responsible for that file during the time period.

There are audits going back to that time period. There is obvious concern in the minister's office of what was actually happening. Then it went into a forensic audit where a number of charges have been laid.

Would my colleague comment on how far he believes the corruption has gone? I know he has looked at some of the documents. Could the member tell us how high the corruption has gone? Does he know who would be responsible and what ministers does he believe should be responsible for what was going on, if it got to that degree and if the knowledge went that high?

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in many situations such as this we now have a new minister. The new minister tries to sweep everything away. We have a former minister who is now an appointee and no longer a member of the government. We have the deputy minister who is now no longer the deputy minister. He has been appointed Governor of the Bank of Canada.

We have very clear evidence. The newspapers were writing in 2000 about how the federal government was taking its fight to court to audit spending at the centre. The government knew there were major problems in existence at that time. Yet we now have a further audit that demonstrates that even while it was doing that it was still flowing money to the foundation. The abuses were growing and not staying the same, not getting smaller. The abuses were getting bolder and bolder. The money that was being scammed was getting into larger and larger numbers.

All of that is a clear indicator to me that there is major corruption at work and is deep seated. It affects some elements of our bureaucracy. This suspicion was there in the early 1990s when I was in this portfolio and it is still there. It has not been fixed.

The signal the government is sending by not making anyone accountable unless they were actually caught with their hand in the cookie jar, on the take, is that we have a vested interest in preferring to bury these problems, more so than exposing them and cleaning up the accounts and the entire situation.

This is a sad story that the Canadian public deserves to know more about than they currently do.

• (1510)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must express some concern that the member seemed to be totally focusing—and that is a bit unfair because he did make some reference to the involvement of certain officials from the Department of Health—all of the blame, and again prejudging this case to some

degree, on the aboriginal community and members of the first nations who were involved in the Fontaine centre.

He seemed to be downplaying and almost ignoring what appears to be some significant role in this scam, if that is in fact what it turns out to be, by federal officials at a fairly high level within the department. I am wondering if the member appreciates what he is doing in that regard.

Would the member agree with me that—not necessarily drawing a final conclusion because obviously this will result in some judicial decision making at some point—to characterize this as I think he has, is somewhat unfair when he points the finger entirely at the aboriginal community in not bringing in what appears to be some significant misdeeds by the public service?

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, that is pretty selective hearing because I indeed plant this firmly at the feet of the federal government. It is the one that provided the funds. It is the one that was supposed to provide the checks and balances or ensure that it was there. It is the one that allowed corrupt federal officials to continue to operate with impunity despite the fact there was an audit way back in 1997 that identified major problems. These people remained in place.

Certainly, there was an opportunity here for Perry Fontaine to do the most incredible things. If people were to read about it in *Pulp Fiction*, they would not believe it because the actions were so bold and so creative. The fact of the matter is that federal officials approved all of this because they were directly benefiting and that should never ever have happened.

There were all kinds of things done against Treasury Board guidelines, but nobody caught it because nobody chose to catch it. That is a sign that we have corruption within our federal bureaucracy. That is my main point. I do not think the member who asked me the question was really listening to me if he thought otherwise.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with the hon. member for Beaches—East York.

The government stated a clear vision for Canadians. This vision reflects how far our country has come over the past decade, while recognizing that a lot remains to be done to ensure that all Canadians from all walks of life and from all regions continue to enjoy prosperity, security and happiness.

Now that our basic macroeconomics parameters are firmly in place, the government feels that we should focus more on developing microeconomics, supporting small businesses, promoting entrepreneurship, building our research capability, reducing manpower shortages, strengthening our commercial infrastructure and developing our communities by investing in the social economy. In short, we must march forward and build a true economy for the 21st century.

The Address

As the Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, I want to take this opportunity to review a few initiatives that come under my portfolio and which are aimed at helping fulfill the government's vision.

•(1515)

[English]

First, I will look at what we are doing to create a positive business environment in Canada. We want to create a climate where the entrepreneurial spirit triumphs.

Second, I will focus on creating and using knowledge. Traditionally, we have talked about the importance of R and D, about investing in innovative ideas, but simply having good ideas is often not enough. We need to take knowledge and turn it into products and services that sell. In a 21st century economy, we should be talking about R and D and C, research and development but also commercialization.

Finally, I want to look at our country's single most important asset, our workforce, and the measures needed to nurture and sustain this critical competitive advantage.

By any objective criteria, the conditions for doing business in Canada are already favourable. Ask any entrepreneur and he or she will say that obstacles remain to efficient and effective commerce in our country. The Government of Canada has listened and is taking action.

[Translation]

In this context, we are creating a fiscal environment that is more beneficial to Canadian businesses. We continue to promote good governance, both in the public and private sectors. We also continue to look for ways to streamline our regulatory framework. We want to harmonize standards at the various levels of government and find ways to address the pressing concerns of businesses, such as the protection of privacy and intellectual property, and data security.

In order to achieve these objectives, we have created the external advisory committee on smart regulation. The creation of this committee shows the importance of this issue and is an important first step to meet the challenges that confront us. I should point out that the Prime Minister even appointed a parliamentary secretary responsible for monitoring the work of this external advisory committee on smart regulation.

[English]

Another area where we are concentrating efforts is removing barriers to internal trade and commerce in this country. This is surely an anachronism in an age where we are seeing national borders disappearing around the world in favour of regional cooperation.

I am pleased that the council of the federation has placed a special emphasis on issues such as internal trade, labour mobility, and harmonizing and streamlining regulations.

The Government of Canada is anxious to work with our provincial partners to improve our economic union. We need to continue to support programs aimed at small and medium sized entrepreneurs to give them the tools they need to compete effectively. This is

particularly true for those individuals who are combining the entrepreneurial spirit with community consciousness. Men and women who look beyond the bottom line and recognize that giving back to the neighbourhood benefits us all.

We want to build a business climate that encourages innovation and entrepreneurship in this country; however, to succeed in the 21st century economy, we need to do more than just support traditional sectors. We need to identify and capitalize on new ideas and opportunities.

[Translation]

Some predict that we are on the brink of another industrial revolution, the era of nanotechnologies and biotechnologies. It must, however, also be the era of Canada.

This is why the Government of Canada has for the past few years been making major investments to renew its research base. We have invested in the universities and colleges, and other research institutes, and have encouraged the creation of centres of knowledge in communities everywhere across the country.

In fact, since 1997 the Government of Canada has invested more than \$3 billion in research based in universities, colleges and institutes all over Canada, and this must continue.

It is not enough, however, to design and develop new technologies. We must get them out of the laboratories and commercialize them. We need to transform knowledge into products and services, thereby creating jobs and contributing to this country's progress.

•(1520)

[English]

In many respects, this will require a new way of thinking in our universities, colleges and research institutions. For too long the science faculties and the business schools have existed as two different worlds. We need to bridge the gap and bring our brightest young minds together with our most savvy entrepreneurs.

The government has already signed an agreement with the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada under which it was agreed to double research by 2010 and triple the rate of commercialization.

The National Research Council administers a successful industrial research assistance program to help small and medium sized businesses in developing and using new innovative technologies and processes.

[Translation]

Bringing the various parties together is an important forward step. We also will be instituting mechanisms to facilitate access to risk capital at all the life stages of new businesses, from start-up to maturity.

*The Address**[English]*

This brings me to my final point. We can have the best regulatory regimes and business climates at the most sophisticated research facilities, but without the right people with the right skills, our country will not rise to achieve its full potential. That is why the government will be looking for ways to provide Canadian workers with greater opportunities to upgrade their skills, improve their literacy and learn on the job.

The government wants to put an emphasis on developing initiatives to support entrepreneurs and particularly new Canadians who wish to become involved in business. Addressing this issue will be a priority in the days ahead and I look forward to working closely on this file with my parliamentary secretary, the member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale.

We will also be looking for ways to capitalize on the greater mobility of skilled workers around the world. We want to brand Canada as the destination of choice for the world's best and brightest. I believe our country should be an easy sell. We have a quality of life that is second to none. But of course, there are obstacles to overcome.

First and foremost, from a business point of view, is the question of accreditation. At a time when we face shortages in nursing, engineering and management, we cannot afford to have qualified immigrants not using their skills to the fullest. We need a pan-Canadian approach to foreign credential recognition and I know that my colleagues are working closely with their provincial counterparts to find solutions to that problem.

[Translation]

The Speech from the Throne sets out the main thrust of a mandate that is both clear and visionary for the Government of Canada. It is a mandate aimed at promoting a more vigorous economy, safer and healthier communities, and a fairer and more equitable society in which all Canadians may realize their aspirations and share in the national prosperity.

The challenges that await us are far more than a single government can do on its own. When we refer to an economy for the 21st century what we need is to mobilize the nation, mobilize companies in the private sector of course, whether big or small, mobilize the provinces and territories, the municipalities and even the volunteer and community sector, along with all Canadians who want to see our country continue to be admired throughout the world.

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the throne speech, especially as it clearly recognizes what I have been saying for some time now, that social policy and economic policy are one and the same.

The main focus of the throne speech, strengthening Canada's social foundations, recognizes that investing in things such as universal health care, education, child care, affordable housing, training and skills, and safe communities is good for society and for our economy as well.

For the earlier part of our mandate we focused more on eliminating the national deficit and lowering the debt. We have also cut both individual and corporate taxes. We have restored full indexation of the personal income tax system and reduced personal income tax by an average of 15% annually.

In more recent years we had begun to increase investment in children, skills training, research and innovation, the environment, health care, crime prevention, affordable housing and infrastructure, although in this case we have been investing since 1994, totalling \$12 billion. Now we are making a commitment to strengthen our commitment to the social deficit.

I am pleased to see the government's commitment to see that every Canadian has timely access to quality care, regardless of income or geography. As the Prime Minister said, care delayed cannot become care denied.

The government is transferring \$2 billion to the provinces as promised, but additional funding alone will not improve health care. I believe that we must follow through, together with the provinces and territories, with health care reform, such as reform of primary care and dealing with home care and long term care.

In my riding of Beaches—East York we have a great example of quality, accessible, timely and sustainable primary care delivery through a community health care centre. The doctors are paid a salary. There are nurse practitioners to help and nutritionists to address healthy living. The doctors are on call 24/7, which keeps most cases from the hospital emergency rooms.

The new Canada public health agency that will ensure Canada is linked both nationally and globally in a network for disease control and emergency response is also welcome. I believe it should deal with public health promotion and preventive care as well.

Also, there is the appointment of a new chief public health officer for Canada, who will undertake a much needed overhaul of federal health protection through a Canada health protection act. This is welcome news.

I was proud to vote in favour of the ratification of the Kyoto accord. I am pleased to see the Government of Canada make a clear commitment to respect its commitment to the Kyoto accord on climate change.

The cleaning up of contaminated sites the government is responsible for by spending \$3.5 billion and helping to remediate contaminated sites such as the tar ponds are well overdue. I am glad to see that.

As well the government is committing to clean air and clean water and will work with the provinces to achieve more stringent national guidelines on air and water quality. It will also start incorporating key indicators on clean water, clean air, and emissions reductions into its decision making.

The Address

It was important for me to see that the government is making a commitment to safe communities. Our current crime prevention program has benefited many communities across Canada. In Beaches—East York this program is helping address the root causes of crime by contributing \$97,744 under the community mobilization program. Neighbourhood Link and East York-East Toronto Family Resources are the agencies delivering the programs.

There is a new deal for our cities that targets the infrastructure needed to support quality of life and sustainable growth, a new deal that delivers reliable, predictable and long term funding. These are statements we have all been working to hear. I know that the residents of my riding and of Toronto are happy to finally hear them.

The government has appointed Mr. Harcourt to help work out long term financial agreements, such as the sharing of a portion of gas revenues or other fiscal mechanisms which achieve the same goals, with the provinces, cities and federal government. The government has made an immediate down payment by providing all municipalities with full relief from the portion of the GST they now pay.

Current investments in infrastructure, urban transit, affordable housing, clean water and good roads will see funds committed.

During the last 10 years I worked very hard toward the eradication of child poverty and to deal with the urgent need of early learning and care for children. The child benefit has been increased to provide \$3,240 for the first child in 2007. This means an annual support of over \$10 billion by 2007.

In 2000 the government signed a historic accord with the provinces on the early childhood development initiative and committed \$2.2 billion to that effect. The Beaches—East York early learning program is receiving \$500,000, most of which is coming from the \$2.2 billion.

•(1525)

The 2003 budget committed an additional \$935 million over the next five years to address quality child care. The government's continued commitment to early learning and care is indeed good news because this will mean more quality child care and better starts for all our children.

Education is fundamental to the quality of life of all our citizens. By this I do not just mean formal education such as college and university, although accessibility to post-secondary education is a must. I am pleased to see that the government is also committing to skills training and working in partnership with union and sector councils.

In Beaches—East York the Government of Canada funds the neighbourhood link employment centre, the Gateway Café which helps youth at risk, the job squad for young people, and summer employment programs. These are programs that I worked hard to bring to the riding and I will continue to ensure their funding.

I am also pleased to see that there is a real commitment to address the shameful way in which we have treated professional immigrants in this country, essentially marginalizing them to low paying jobs. Canada has the most highly skilled and educated taxi drivers and large numbers of doctors are being wasted even while there is a shortage of doctors. We made promises here before and I intend to

hold the government's feet to the fire on the commitment in the Speech from the Throne to address the problem of foreign credentials.

Finally, I am pleased that the government has recognized the importance of the characteristic that most reflects who and what we are to ourselves and to the world, and that is our culture. Canada's artists and cultural organizations, including our multicultural arts, make us a distinct society and we must support and nurture it. Public broadcasting is fundamental to maintaining Canada's cultural sovereignty. I will continue to ensure that the government continues to provide sustainable funding.

This, I must say, is the Speech from the Throne that I have been waiting for.

•(1530)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it would be impossible to list in just 10 minutes all the concerns that have been raised by the Speech from the Throne.

But in the next 10 minutes—and I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Laurentides—I would like to concentrate my remarks on three subjects: health, government ethics and aboriginal affairs.

In the throne speech, the government has not mentioned any plan for additional funding for the future, nor any stability in the transfer payments to Quebec and the provinces for health financing. And yet health is the highest priority, not only in Quebec but in Canada as well.

The Minister of Finance, echoing the Prime Minister who said it through the throne speech, has repeatedly told us that public finances are tight. He can only honour a two-year-old promise that a one-time payment of \$2 billion would be transferred—a promise his predecessor made. But for the rest, the public purse is too strained and he will not be able to free up any money.

This Prime Minister, once the minister of finance, still has the same tendency to hide the true picture of public finances from the people. This year there will be a surplus of at least \$6 or \$7 billion. The minister is going to great lengths to show us that it will be difficult, that there may be only \$2 or \$3 billion, but there will be \$6 or \$7 billion, and my estimate is conservative.

He already has \$6 or \$7 billion he could use to plan an additional transfer to the provinces to fulfil one of the recommendations in the report by Mr. Romanow, who is not a sovereigntist, namely, that the federal government ought to increase its contribution from 16% to 25% of health costs.

The Address

The second suggestion we could make to the Minister of Finance is one he knows well, because he designed these measures. The large number of foundations he created while he was finance minister are completely ineffective. These foundations are still holding \$7 billion. Why does the federal government not take back the billions of dollars lying dormant in those foundations in order to do something about people's real priorities, which are health and education?

Education was neglected, due to the systematic cuts initiated by the former finance minister, now Prime Minister. He is responsible for the health care crisis. He is also responsible for the precarious situation in education, because he slashed transfer payments to these two essential services.

Let us talk about ethics. The Minister of Finance repeated it following the throne speech: they want to redo or examine the tax system to see if it could be made more equitable, ensure equal treatment for all, and eliminate any tax loopholes. It is a disgrace.

It is disgraceful that this is what the government wants to do when we are now faced with the situation created by the former finance minister, now Prime Minister, with regard to a bill he introduced himself for the first time in 1996, Bill C-69, and a second time, through his parliamentary secretary in 1998. This bill, Bill C-28, granted Canada Steamship Lines International, headquartered in Barbados, undue benefits in terms of tax treatments and also protection from legal proceedings, for example, if it were in violation of environmental standards or minimum workings standards.

The throne speech refers to ethics, and we have before us a Prime Minister who himself initiated highly questionable legislation that is in his own interests and the interests of his company, to the tune of \$100 million per year.

When I let the cat out of the bag in 1998, everyone was skeptical, so much so that, at one point, we wondered about the contents of Bill C-28. However, on verification, following numerous analyses, after getting outside experts to look at these analyses and debating with the former finance minister and the former prime minister, who protected him because he was unable to defend himself—he was unable to defend the indefensible—we realized that Bill C-28 was totally unacceptable.

It was almost like helping himself to the public purse, since the \$100 million he has not paid in tax over the past five years is being paid by others. By those earning minimum wage. Families are suffering because of him. These families pay tax, but he does not.

• (1535)

Today, he is trying to defend the indefensible.

As for the ethics issue, I was listening to Mr. Jean Lapierre, who just joined the Liberal Party of Canada and said that the Bloc Quebecois was outdated. However, if the Bloc Quebecois is outdated, on the ethics level, the Liberal Party is in an advanced state of decomposition. This new Prime Minister has solved nothing.

Let us take the example of Gagliano, of the sponsorship contracts. He had promised that there would be a more serious inquiry. He did not mention this at all in the Speech from the Throne. Yet, this is a very serious issue. It is the very integrity of the government that is in

question. And he, as the successor in this Liberal government, should be concerned about this. But he is not.

I think that the Prime Minister is missing a great opportunity to correct the ethics situation. And if he does not have the political will to do so, it means that he thinks ethics is not an important value.

We see this in the actions on Bill C-28. We also see this in the nonsense uttered by his Minister of Finance, who says that Bill C-28 did not affect CSL, while even the vice-president of CSL told us that changes were made since 1995 to international holdings, to comply with changes made to the Canadian Income Tax Act. And it was at the same time that this act was being framed, that the current Prime Minister, the then Minister of Finance, was framing the act.

Consequently, these changes were made especially for CSL International, to ensure that the current Prime Minister, the former finance minister and ship owner could save \$100 million in taxes. These changes were also made so that he would be protected against Canadian environmental laws if he caused disasters with his ships in international waters. Moreover, these changes were made so that he could be protected against Canadian laws on minimal labour standards. Indeed, he hires Filipino workers for \$10 a day.

If CSL International were not now deemed a foreign company because of Bill C-28, which he introduced in this House himself, he would be charged for his antisocial acts. He may claim to work for the less fortunate in society, but he is exploiting people through CSL International. Filipino workers paid \$10 a day for working in atrocious conditions is not exactly helping the less fortunate. Do as I say, not as I do. My colleague from Laurier—Sainte-Marie, the Leader of the Bloc Quebecois, was right.

My third point concerns aboriginals. They must be sick of hearing in every Speech from the Throne how aboriginal children have health and substance abuse problems and how aboriginals have problems with governance, yet nothing is ever done to resolve the aboriginal issue. They must be sick of being studied in anthropology.

Indeed, they are fed up. While the Minister of Finance was part of cabinet, while he dithers about speeding up negotiations for self-government, aboriginal nations are dying. Aboriginal children are committing suicide. Aboriginal children have multiple addictions. Entire communities are living in conditions that are reprehensible for a country that is supposed to be one of the most advanced in the world. There is a limit on using aboriginals to make the throne speech look good.

The Address

Do you know how long it has been since the Erasmus-Dussault report was tabled? Almost 7 years. Contrary to the recommendation by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, there has been no acceleration in negotiations to make aboriginal communities independent, to respect their inherent right to self-government, to give them the tools they need to take charge of their own development, bearing in mind the fact that they are nations within the United Nations definition.

Seven years have been wasted with this government and time will continue to be wasted. The events at Kanesatake should be a wake-up call. To go to aboriginal communities and see the incredible poverty, unemployment rates of 80%, young aboriginals with no hope for the future; is this not a breeding ground for organized crime? That is what is happening.

As for events such as those that occurred at Kanesatake in 1990 and recently, there are hundreds of communities in danger of facing the same fate because the government is not thinking about speeding up negotiations for self-government and not thinking about resolving this issue once and for all.

• (1540)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, actually, I would like the hon. member to comment on the latest crisis at Kanesatake.

A chief, James Gabriel, decided to tighten up discipline in his territory, and he asked for assistance from the other first nations communities in Quebec. We saw how the situation turned out. We saw the Government of Quebec intervene and the terrible handling of the situation. The chief lost almost all his credibility as a result of the Quebec government's interventions.

Still, we did not see any intervention by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, although it is very familiar with the relations among the first nations. That is the hard reality of the throne speech. Many words are written but when the time comes to make decisions, the federal government is absent.

Many documents can be written about it. That is not a problem. When there is a crisis like the one at Kanesatake, what action should the federal government have taken? That is what I am asking the hon. member.

Mr. Yvan Loubier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. The federal government has indeed had nothing to say for over a week in connection with Kanesatake, although it is the prime fiduciary of Indians according to the old Indian Act.

What is worse is that it was there when James Gabriel and a large portion of the band council asked for help from the federal government to fight organized crime. Let no one say these are just suppositions. The Hells Angels are there and are trafficking in drugs and cigarettes, and in weapons as well. That has been going on since 1990.

Mr. Gabriel was given the help. In a document awarding the \$900,000 to him to help fight organized crime, there was an acknowledgment of the urgency of action, the presence of organized crime, and the extraordinary nature of the situation at Kanesatake. Once he was given the money things took a turn for the worse and the government washed its hands of any responsibility, turned its

back and walked out the door. That is how the federal government acted.

This is a totally irresponsible way of acting, particularly when the Government of Quebec, Mr. Chagnon in particular, had acted in a totally responsible manner, undermining the credibility of duly elected Grand Chief James Gabriel, saying he was the one who had made mistakes. It is easy to accuse others when such things happen. Negotiating with people associated with crime, and likely connected to those who torched Grand Chief Gabriel's house, is a serious matter.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly raise with my hon. colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot the issue of ethics, but mostly of Bill C-69, which later became Bill C-28.

This is a matter of concern to me, because the throne speech mentions fairness, transparency, greater involvement for members of Parliament, and so on. Since the hon. member used to be the finance critic for our party, I would like him to confirm the following.

If memory serves me well, shipping companies were mentioned in an omnibus bill which was introduced, I believe, during the Easter break or something like that. And that is what they call transparency and fairness.

• (1545)

Mr. Yvan Loubier: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his question. Indeed, that bill was introduced twice.

The first time, in 1996, the finance minister introduced Bill C-69. The provision concerning international shipping was found at the very end of the 485 page bill, which died on the order paper when an election was called.

He tried again in 1998. He had his own parliamentary secretary introduce the same omnibus bill that contained, again at the very end, the same minor provision of about 20 lines or so. I thought he showed then a total lack of transparency in a premeditated way. In 1996, he had himself introduced this provision for the first time in Bill C-69. If he does not know what he is putting forward, that is a whole other issue.

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for his comments.

I also want to salute the constituents of my riding of Laurentides and tell them that it is always a pleasure and an honour for me to represent them here in the House of Commons. As we know, there will soon be an election and there will be some changes in the ridings, but I wanted to salute the people in my current riding.

I have been sitting in this Parliament for over 10 years and I have seen more than my fair share of throne speeches, red books, government promises, budgets and committee reports. Again, one would have expected something much more interesting, something that would truly benefit ordinary people in their daily lives. But it is not the case with the throne speech.

It is very clear from the outset that there is absolutely nothing for workers. In a Speech from the Throne, one would expect to find some concrete measures to help workers.

The Address

There is nothing on employment insurance, there is no anti-scab legislation, and there is not even an attempt to try to find a solution for these people. In the Abitibi, Radio-Nord employees have already been on strike for 15 long months. These people no longer have an income and they are picketing in minus 40 degree Celsius temperatures, while their bosses are using scabs. This is in 2004. This still exists here, at the federal level, but it should not.

There is nothing in this speech for these people, or for seasonal workers whose situation is unbearable. There is nothing to provide much greater accessibility to employment insurance, even though we know that the employment insurance fund is generating huge surpluses. Yet, only four out of ten workers qualify for benefits. It does not make any sense to still find ourselves in this situation.

The surpluses that are generated should be given back to the workers who pay for an insurance and who should be able to collect benefits. But this is not the case right now. On the contrary, the poor are getting poorer.

The government has been dragging its heels on the issue of parental leave. We have been wanting to settle this matter as soon as possible. In Quebec, a decision was rendered in our favour. What did we hear today from the human resources minister? He told the House that he was keeping all of his options open, which means that he could appeal the decision. That is probably what he will be doing.

Again, we will not be treated fairly on the issue of parental leave. We will have to fight for years to come and go through some things we would rather avoid. We could find a way to settle the problem. We could sit together, negotiate and quickly come to an agreement. However, the government is making very clear its lack of desire to come to an agreement with Quebec. And that is unfortunate. It is sad that this whole issue was not mentioned in the throne speech. It is sad for the parents who have been asking for this for a very long time and who really need it.

There is not a single word in the throne speech about the missile defence shield, this megaproject that we hear so much about here and for which the Prime Minister is showing so much support that some Liberal members have asked to have a free vote on the issue. The Prime Minister turned down their request.

Even members of his own caucus are against the missile defence shield. We do not know how much it will cost and what it will do. Billions of dollars will be involved, and all we are going to do is agree to whatever the U.S. will say. If the government were to consult the people, to ask constituents what they think about a missile defence shield, it would get a very clear answer: a resounding no. We do not want it because we are not warriors. We do not want it because we do not know how much it will cost. We do not know what its environmental impact will be. We do not know either what other impact it could have. No studies have been carried out, so we are just rushing into this.

You only have to talk to U.S. congressmen and senators to see how extremely divided they themselves are on this issue.

• (1550)

In fact, they believe it is unnecessary, because it would cost a fortune, and because it is not true that it would stop terrorism. A missile defence shield is not going to stop terrorism. Terrorists will

continue to hijack planes and infiltrate countries they wish to inflict damage on. So, it is not the solution.

Once again, it is being done in secret, behind our backs and behind closed doors, and they are trying to get away with something. This matter should be dealt with in an open and informed manner. This is not what is happening right now.

I hope that we will be able to stand up to the Americans. This is extremely important. We cannot do everything they want. We must evaluate this according to our criteria, our abilities and what Canada and Quebec really want. If this work is not done here, there will be huge battles in Parliament. There will be a public uprising. There is nothing about this in the throne speech.

I know that I do not have much time because 10 minutes is quite short. However, I want to consider the following. The throne speech mentions the provinces. It says:

Jurisdiction must be respected. But Canadians do not go about their daily lives—

I really like the “but”, because it opens the door to anything. It continues:

But Canadians do not go about their daily lives worried about which jurisdiction does this or that.

Once again, they want to interfere in areas of provincial jurisdiction. Once again, they want to tell us what we must do.

In terms of municipalities, there have been squabbles about the millennium scholarships for years. There was committee after committee. It never worked and yet, once again, they are talking about student loans, when Quebec has a loan and scholarship program that is very equitable for our students.

They are encroaching on our jurisdiction, our municipalities. In fact, municipalities are a provincial responsibility. I cannot read it all because there is not enough time, but if people read it, they will see that the government is interfering when it comes to municipalities.

In terms of health, the throne speech states:

The government will also appoint a new Chief Public Health Officer for Canada—and undertake a much-needed overhaul of federal health protection through a Canada Health Protection Act.

As far as I know, health comes totally under provincial jurisdiction, and the government will again create another position and another committee to tell us what we should do in our own province.

It is not true that problems in the health system are the same all across Canada and in Quebec. We can be responsible and manage our own problems. Give us the money, and do not worry, we will do the job. We do not need someone to tell us what to do in our own province. We are perfectly capable of managing our own affairs.

This document sounds like a wish list. I have seen that many times before. There is also a reference to parliamentary reform. This is unbelievable. I cannot tell you how many recommendations I have made in committee in 10 years.

The Address

For example, the report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities contained 17 unanimous recommendations. All political parties were in agreement. The committee passed on these 17 unanimous recommendations to the minister, hoping that she would look at them. That was a year and a half, or two years ago. None of them was accepted. This is just a simple example, but it is an important one.

And now we are being told that changes will be made to the way Parliament works and that it will make everything better. The government should start by following up on the reports that have already been tabled, and then we will see.

I must say that some extraordinary work has been done here in the House of Commons. This is why I would have liked to see the work of parliamentarians and the recommendations from committees reflected in the Speech from the Throne, but this is not what we see here.

As far as I am concerned, the Speech from the Throne is just another speech, like many others, that will produce no results. Promises are made, but they never lead anywhere.

• (1555)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question. The Speech from the Throne is over 20 pages long, but I found on page 12 a short sentence that simply says:

And the Government will help communities to help themselves.

I will give my colleague from Laurentides an example that she and my friend from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, who is here with me, know very well. I am referring to the Mirabel Airport, which is a good example of the support the federal government is providing.

In 1985, 74 Liberal members of Parliament, including Jean Lapierre, were from Quebec. The fact that he is coming back makes me smile. He was part of the 74 Quebec Liberal members who did not have enough backbone to make sure the original plan was followed. Dorval was to be shut down and all flights were to be transferred to Mirabel, which was an airport built for the future. Even in 2004, Dorval is still among the Canadian airports with the lowest occupancy rates. Why is it so? Because the Liberal government has never been able to make timely decisions.

That is my point. They are trying to tell us that they will come and help the communities. I have seen the problem; I have heard what the citizens had to say. For Mirabel, it meant moving more than 3,000 people, the largest population displacement since the deportation of the Acadians. Some 100,000 acres of land were expropriated and people were displaced for what we have today, which is an empty hotel, an empty administrative centre and an air terminal that will be empty come November.

I am therefore asking my colleague what she thinks of the development of communities program put forward by the Liberal party.

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. I am also directly affected by the Mirabel issue, since my riding is next to that of the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

These are fights we have waged in the House of Commons. I remember being part of a regional coalition fighting for the Mirabel airport. My colleague from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles will remember that. This is one of the nicest airports in the world, but it has been underutilized; Dorval was the preferred airport. A horrendous amount of money was put into this airport. And they still want to invest more millions of dollars there, because they are having problems with it, as my colleague knows.

Lives have been broken. We have an infrastructure that will soon become obsolete if we do not use it. That fact is being ignored. This is what the Liberal government is all about. It does not take at heart the interests of Quebecers. It is just mismanaging their affairs. Of course, it is investing money in the Toronto airport, which it wants to establish as a transportation hub. That is the way it works.

We are here to stand for our constituents, advance issues and fight for the Mirabel airport. During the election campaign, you can bet you will hear about Mirabel. We will have to keep fighting for the interests of the people in our regions. We have to reopen this airport, restore its value, and make it operational, so that flights may eventually be transferred from Dorval to Mirabel.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague raised many interesting points in her speech. I would like to ask her a question.

She spoke a great deal about workers' rights and about the absence in the Speech from the Throne of paying deference to workers' rights. I would like to ask her a question on one aspect of that.

Is the hon. member aware that the current Income Tax Act allows businesses to deduct the fine for a workplace safety and health accident from their income tax as a business expense? Would the member comment on whether she thinks it is fair that breaking the law and injuring workers on the job should be tax deductible and that the government should forgo revenue from that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay: Mr. Speaker, I will respond briefly. My colleague is totally right, this double standard is unacceptable.

It is also unacceptable that workers under the Canada Labour Code are so behind compared to Quebec workers. In Quebec, we have a labour code that is much more advanced than the Canada Labour Code. We are bringing forth amendments and changes to try to improve the Canada Labour Code, but this House does not want to listen.

I introduced anti-scab legislation and a vote was held. We came very close to succeeding. You can be assured that I will continue to defend legislation that supports workers. I will continue to work with the colleagues who support me and we will try once again to make this government move forward, which is so difficult to do.

The Address

The Deputy Speaker: Before we continue with the debate, so there is no surprise, I would like to inform the House that there has been a change in the rotation of speakers. There has been a trade between the government party and the official opposition. The rotation would normally have required that the floor be given to the government member. I will give it to the official opposition member. Consequently, two rotations will then be necessary on the government side.

[English]

So, with the new rotation exchange having been agreed to between the two parties, I will now give the floor to the member for Blackstrap.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for St. John's West.

The throne speech; been there, done that. That is what it was. Canadians want to move on. We were told that the throne speech marks the start of a new government, a new agenda, a new way of working. This is still the Liberal Party and this throne speech could have been copied from any other similar speeches over the last 10 years.

Just to tell members how the throne speech played at home, this letter to the editor on the throne speech, written by Christopher Twa of Saskatoon, was in our local *StarPhoenix*. It states:

Citizens have obligation to demand accountability

Like many others, I was always comfortable in forecasting political events from a barstool or from the moderate recline of my favourite armchair.

However, I had never seen a throne speech before Monday. It always seemed a great non-event; brave assertions written exclusively to be discarded later.

I watched the usher hammer on the door, MPs exchange handshakes and sly winks in a bizarre courtship and three-quarters of the Governor General's speech before I turned the TV off because of boredom.

Later that evening, as I watched Americans beg for accountability, I felt the first twinge of guilt. While many in Canada are content to dub the U.S. an oppressive regime, we do little to hold our own government answerable for its actions.

Gov. Gen. Adrienne Clarkson had spoken of the need to make politics more engaging just before I turned the TV off. She is right. Perhaps it is us rather than the politicians who need to become proactive.

If we remain mute or only vaguely grumble on every issue, should we not expect our voted representatives to stumble blindly? Accountability only works if we show concern. We are as responsible as the politicians for our nation's well-being.

That is what I would like to talk about today.

We have the same Liberal government with the same members in a new seating arrangement who have tried to rule Canada for the past 10 years. Let us not pretend that this is a new government with a new agenda.

As a proud westerner I am very concerned that even though the new Prime Minister has promised to work toward less western alienation, this Speech from the Throne has left us out in the cold once again.

It continues the Liberal legacy of disregard for a major and essential part of Canada, our bread basket. Farmers are wondering why they have once again been ignored. Little in this speech gives reassurance or concrete assistance to our ailing farms, our hardworking farmers and producers across Canada.

In the vagueness of the speech, the government is supposedly dedicated to Canada's farm economy, but there was absolutely nothing that tells us how or that gives the farmers the hope that they were searching for.

Our agriculture and food sector is the third largest employer of Canadians and one of the country's top five industries. It accounts for more than 8% of the Canadian gross domestic product. Recognition of this importance is nowhere to be seen in the throne Speech.

In the last few years our farmers have been crushed by extraneous circumstances, such as mad cow, drought and floods.

In revealing his vision in the throne speech, the Prime Minister showed his complete lack of understanding of the BSE crisis and his lack of compassion for our farmers, specifically our beef farmers.

Canadians are suffering from coast to coast in every region and province. It has been absolutely devastating. Last night we had speakers on the BSE debate. We had speakers from Vancouver, from Peace River, from Quebec and from Ontario. Every province and every region has been affected.

When I go to my home city stories like this are in the newspaper. The lack of news coverage does not mean the BSE crisis is over. Yesterday's paper reads:

Saskatchewan's feedlot industry is in a rapid decline as producers face the biggest disaster of the nine-month mad cow ordeal, some in the cattle business warned Tuesday.

"I think that we're in the 11th hour of a catastrophe, there's no question"....

● (1605)

"The market deteriorates every day and there's no light at the end of the tunnel to speak of"....

"The feedlot industry is in huge trouble. They're getting to the point where they have no margins left for operating lines and they can't buy cattle."

The head of the Alberta Cattle Feeders Association warned Monday that Canada's feeder industry could collapse in as little as six weeks if nothing changes for the better.

—the problem is "monumental."

"Most of us don't have the ability to speculate anymore—we've lost enough equity that either ourselves, our own management ability, or our bankers are telling us no more speculation.

"We've lost all our equity, our collateral."

They say that the desperation among ranchers is very clear. "They're just grasping at the last straw, trying to buy some time and hope beyond hope this border issue gets resolved."

The headlines "BSE costs total \$3 billion in Canada", was ignored in Monday's throne speech.

The situation has reached emergency proportions and the Prime Minister, I believe, has to treat it as an emergency. As many of my colleagues said last night in debate, this does warrant an emergency level. I think the Prime Minister would do that if he had a real connection to the agriculture sector or if he had any real sense of the severity of the situation.

Federal alienation in western provinces has become a real problem.

The Address

It was interesting to read in one of the papers this week "West says it has got the cold shoulder". The paper had interviewed Robert Roach, the senior policy analyst for the Calgary based think tank, the Canada West Foundation. He was quoted in the *Vancouver Sun* as saying that the government should have made a commitment to structural change to give westerners a voice at the federal level. Options, according to Mr. Roach, include reforming the Senate and recruiting senior bureaucrats for the west, even if they do not speak French. As he said, "Bilingualism needs to be counterbalanced by something else, because it's a very practical barrier to westerners".

Western alienation can be overcome with awareness that all the western provinces are as valuable as the eastern ones. The people living in the west require the same services, financial assistance and respect that those in the east have long been receiving.

The GST relief offered to our municipalities is welcome, but the GST was set up to reduce a debt. Even though the Liberals had wanted to scrap this tax altogether, it is now being used as a cash injection. Also, as many of our communities in Saskatchewan and in Canada are not considered cities, they too will receive a significant piece of the pie.

I am in support of the idea of including municipalities but have grave concerns about how the government plans to include all the provinces in this arrangement. The government could vacate an amount allowing the provincial governments to give to the municipalities a percentage of the gas tax.

My concern is that this money will not be flagged for infrastructure. We need some details on how this money will be spread out. The \$7 billion over 10 years, the GST rebate to cities that is mentioned in the throne speech, is really just 10% of the money that Ottawa collects.

The government keeps making these promises with regard to the constituents in my riding. Many of them have written or phoned my office asking for some real results. My constituents, relating to their own experience, are telling me that employment insurance is not working. They are telling me that there are not enough staff to handle peak times, which is often in the fall. They are complaining that it takes too long to start receiving their benefits. If they had a surplus of cash they probably would not have applied for EI in the first place.

The students in my riding who attend university and other post-secondary institutions are really concerned about the process of applying for student loans.

We need a commitment. We need a real effort. We need a government with real integrity and the throne speech needs to have substance.

• (1610)

The government must re-examine and redefine our agriculture sector, our aboriginal issues, our health care system and our cities. It needs to give Canadians real dollars, real effort and real integrity. It has to be a country defined by its citizens, not by the government.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to the document presented this week, the throne speech, which will be a Liberal re-election pamphlet. However, if one had listened to what was said without analyzing the document

thoroughly, one might say that there was a lot of stuff contained in the speech. When we do analyze it we find a lot of fluff and very little substance.

I have many items I would like to talk about but I am limited to 10 minutes so I will refer to some very general topics, one being health care.

Recently we saw the premiers all gathered together and being given a gift of \$2 billion for health care by the Prime Minister. This seems to be a new initiative but it is not. It was promised back in the 2003 budget and talked about for years before that. Everybody has said that it will give a boost to health care when, at the same time they are suffering at the provincial levels because of cuts of \$25 billion, over 12 times the amount they were given, cuts by the same minister.

What is in the throne speech to help our seniors, the people who have served us so well and are left with so little? What is in the throne speech to benefit one senior in the country?

I mentioned the other day to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans that the fisheries had not even been mentioned. He said that the speech talked about the ocean and the Oceans Act and that they were going to do such wonderful work with the Oceans Act.

Let me say how interested the government is in the Oceans Act. In British Columbia we have an organization called the aquatic management board. Following the principles of the Ocean Act, this group is the only organization authorized under the Oceans Act. The government trumpets that the board as an organization is progressive thinking and engages the Oceans Act to the fullest.

How much does it appreciate the organization? The government announced a three year funding pilot project for the aquatic management board. The first year the board received a lump sum of \$240,000. This year, year two, it received the first two quarterly payments of \$60,000 each. However it has not received one single cent since August.

The board is now operating on a skeleton budget. Many of the board members are so committed that they are volunteering their time because they realize how important it is. Unfortunately, the minister does not.

DFO is saying, by the way, that the money has been approved but that it has been held up in the department by administrative errors. I did not believe that until in recent days we saw how really incompetent some of our accountants apparently are when they get mixed up between figures of \$137,000 and \$161 million. If they make mistakes like that I can easily understand why there may be some clerical delays within departments.

In the few moments I have left I want to concentrate on one part of the speech, the part that deals with post-secondary students. We have this great commitment from the government to address the concerns of the post-secondary students.

The Address

For a couple of years now some of us have been saying to anyone who would listen, “we must make post-secondary education affordable”. It is not affordable today unless students have a lot of money or access to money through their parents. Some people might also say that students can borrow or get student loans. We realize that a student loan today does not cut it, for two reasons. First, if students are forced to borrow the maximum they are left with a horrendous debt and, in most cases, the student loan program does not provide enough to cover the costs of education.

● (1615)

If students live near the university where they can walk to school, go home for lunch or dinner, live at home and avoid the extra cost of apartments, travel, food, furniture, then, yes, a student loan will cover the cost of their tuition and books. I know some of the pages here realize full well what I am saying.

If students do not live near the university and incur these extra expenses, they will find that the extra costs above and beyond tuition really double, in fact in many cases more than double, the total cost of their education.

Where are they going to get the money to fill that gap? They can work in the summer if they can find employment. In the rural areas it is extremely hard to find work, and six or eight weeks work just will not cut it.

If their parents have the money, well and good. They will cough up anywhere I would suggest from \$3,000 to \$10,000 a year, and I can show receipts to prove it, to cover the cost of their child's education. If they do not have the money and the student does not have access to it, the student has two options: go for a few months, live on Kraft dinner and then drop out when the money runs out; or not go at all, which is the most sorrowful thing. Unfortunately too many of our young people have to choose the second option.

The government has said that it will address it. It stated that loan limits would be increased. The government will let them borrow more money and instead of coming out owing \$50,000, students can now borrow \$70,000 and get their education. Of course when our students come out with big debt loads, they head south of the border where the big money is.

Family income thresholds will be raised to improve access for middle income families. What does that mean? It means that students again will be able to borrow more money.

The third thing the government will do is measures will be taken to improve loan terms for part time students. If one is a part time student, one can get a bigger loan.

Finally, the government will provide a new grant for low income students to cover a portion of the tuition for the first year of post-secondary education. What does that really mean, a portion of the tuition for the first year? If we look at the cost of a four, five or six year program and lump in travel, apartments or residence, clothing furniture and of course the cost of the student's books on top of the tuition, we can appreciate the cost and the burden for young people. We are going to look at part of the tuition, just the tuition, which is a minuscule amount of the overall cost in the first year.

Therefore, we will suck them in and we will say that post-secondary is available. They can go in and do their first year and part of their tuition will be covered. Then they will get in there and find the only way they can stay is borrow to the hilt.

This is turning more people away. I am not advocating free education, although we would all like to see it. I had a major conference this summer with a lot of Newfoundland students. They like other students yesterday were out protesting the treatment by the government and the horrendous costs of education.

Let us make education available. Let us make sure that every young person in the country with the ability to get an education has that opportunity, whether it be in college or in university. Let us adjust our funding so it becomes affordable and students have a reasonable loan to pay back, and no matter what part of the country or what the socio-economic status they can receive an education. For the rest of their lives they will contribute to the country rather than take away.

Let us hope the government wakes up. Let us hope that we will invest in our greatest resources, the young people of the country.

● (1620)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know we have asked this question of a number of different members. However, I will ask the question of this member because of his long involvement and knowledge of the fisheries on the east coast.

In the throne speech there is a statement on page 17 which seems to suggest that the government is looking at lifting the moratorium against drilling and exploring for gas and oil off the west coast. I know the member for St. John's West is particularly knowledgeable of the impact that just the exploration for oil has had on some of the fisheries in the Maritimes area.

Could the member indicate what his position is and what his commentary might be with regard to the proposed lifting of the moratorium?

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Speaker, I will gladly give the member my opinion.

First, it is pretty interesting to note that the NDP keep asking the question on a day when David Suzuki and others of his foundation are in the galleries. We understand what its agenda is, and there is an election coming up.

There are certain sensitive areas in our ocean which should be protected. Which areas should be protected is a decision that should be made by both governments. The federal government controls anything beyond the shoreline, and I question that for several reasons. Provincial governments should have major input into that. We have to benefit from our resources.

The Address

Keep in mind that there are sensitive areas like breeding grounds for fish, special coral regions, feeding grounds, areas that contain plants that provide oxygen, plants that provide food to the biomass that swims in the area and food fish which feed other larger species. There are many reasons why certain selected areas should be protected, like the breeding grounds for the northern cod which have been raped because the draggers swoop in and grab the fish that congregate there to breed. However, the areas would have to be determined.

I do not agree with the wholesale opening up of all the areas. Nor do I agree with protecting every part of the ocean as some would like to do. We have to reap the resources for the benefit of the people. However, we have to use common sense and provide our people with the means to use the resources for their benefit while ensuring we protect the resources and provide an environment in which they can continue to prosper and grow. Can they go hand in hand? Yes, they can if we do it properly.

• (1625)

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I compliment my colleague for his knowledge of oceans and fisheries and my other colleague for bringing forth the issue of oceans, which was hardly mentioned in the throne speech.

My hon. colleague just introduced his private member's bill on the subject of custodial management over the nose and tail of the Grand Banks, those parts of our continental shelf that extend beyond the 200 mile limit. We have great problems with enforcement issues there with NAFO. We also have a lack of resources to enforce the violations of our fishery which are taking place by international fishers. No money was mentioned for our fisheries, and some 600 workers may be laid off. I hope they are not the frontline people.

Could the member comment on the funding for oceans and fisheries?

Could he also comment of the government's commitment on funding for our military, which received mention on only 9 lines in the throne speech? Most of those lines were taken up with the great discovery by the government that the military needed helicopters after cancelling the contract 10 years ago which cost \$500 million for zero helicopters.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Speaker, if the member wants me to comment fully on these questions, we would be here for at least a week because there is so much information. The government's record on either of these areas is horrendous.

There is not one aspect of the military that does not need funding. The government's attention to our military has been atrocious. My colleague mentioned the helicopter issue. Ten years ago the prime minister said that he was going to cancel this expensive contract. People thought it was a lot of money when billions of dollars were mentioned. When people are hit with high figures, without proper analysis and explanation, they will agree until they have time to size up what it is all about.

The same prime minister at the same time said that we did not need free trade. The Liberals campaigned against it and won an election. The Liberals said that they would abolish the GST. The budget that the Prime Minister, formerly the finance minister, brags

about today was created by income from the GST, from the benefits of free trade, as well as from a third Liberal policy of cutting and slashing social programs.

This cutting and slashing has led to a decrease in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Our stocks are being raped because of improper surveillance. There are no frontline people to act as wardens on our rivers because they have been cut each year. Our Coast Guard has been decimated, and I could go on and on.

The Deputy Speaker: Before proceeding with the debate, I wish to inform the House that there is an error in the text of government business No. 2 as printed in today's notice paper. A revised copy of the notice paper is available at the table. I certainly regret any inconvenience this may have caused hon. members.

[*Translation*]

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

• (1630)

Hon. Yvon Charbonneau (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness (Emergency Preparedness), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last evening, when I set out the main thrust of the Speech from the Throne delivered Monday by the Governor General, along with a summary of the government's action plan, on which the Prime Minister had spoken the day before, the 400 people present in this assembly of which I am a member warmly applauded this clear and dynamic speech.

They had a number of reasons to be pleased with the speech. They were pleased to hear the Prime Minister, via the throne speech, affirm and confirm in the most convincing way our desire to build a Canada on solid social foundations, where people will be treated with respect and no one will be left out. They were happy to hear this objective mentioned, particularly as the number one priority.

We have been hearing a lot from the opposition parties about the new Prime Minister and his policy direction, which they claim to know. There is no point in seeking to find that direction in all sorts of allegations and statements that are meaningless. It must be looked for where it really is, that is in the top priority of the throne speech: building a country on solid social foundations.

The second priority mentioned by the Prime Minister is to have a strong and open economy to help us meet the challenges of the 21st century and take advantage of meaningful jobs.

The Address

That economy will also allow us to remain or become leaders in such areas as information technology and biotechnologies, where we are already well established, and in as yet lesser known areas such as nanotechnologies, with great promise for the future, as well as in an area very close to my heart, and I think the hearts of the people of Canada and Quebec: the development of environmental technologies, ecotechnologies.

The Prime Minister made himself very clear about these aspects, these pillars which will ensure that the Canadian economy in all regions will be strong, healthy, competitive and productive in the years to come.

Third in our priorities and goals—and people around me were quite proud to hear this—is our commitment to give Canada, our country, a role and influence in the international community. We will be proud because our country will have an independent voice, like it did in the talks about the war against Iraq.

Inquiries have been launched in the United States and in Great Britain into the role played by intelligence services. We do not have this kind of problem here.

Canada wants to have an independent voice. The public is proud of the direction taken by our country last year. That is what they tell us whenever they get a chance.

We will also be proud to see more and more forward looking initiatives in Canada, and leading edge projects in international cooperation. These projects promote Canadian values internationally.

I want to thank for its attention the audience I had in my riding of Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies last night. Approximately half were members of our party, but the others had no political allegiance. We had people from the provincial and municipal level, from school boards, volunteer agencies, ethnic communities, and economic agencies. These people had no political allegiance, but were interested in knowing what was going on politically at the federal level and what the government had to say in the speech.

● (1635)

These people were very happy to hear the throne speech, whatever their political allegiance. We did not ask them about that. We know that about half of them were Liberal Party members. We did not ask questions or give a test at the door in order to find out the political affiliation of the other half. These people came because they were interested in what was happening, what was going on and what our main thrust was going to be. Therefore, people were happy to see that the throne speech and the Prime Minister's speech provided a fresh impetus and a new vision.

They greatly appreciated this new vision, a vision of partnerships to be created or developed, partnerships with the provinces and the municipalities. Here in the House there are some who do not like it when we talk about partnerships with the municipalities and the provinces. These people are not happy unless everyone is fighting all the time. We are also talking about partnerships with business and new partnerships with organizations in the social economy. That is something new; that is a refreshing change. There also are partnerships with our American neighbour, based on mutual respect, reciprocity and transparency.

These people were happy to hear about this government's commitments to ethics, transparency and accountability. They were also happy to see that we would be working together as members of Parliament in order to take on more responsibilities and work in an atmosphere that will be more stimulating for our ideas and our work here, and that will enable us and those of our opposition colleagues who would like to take part in this reform and renewal, to get things moving.

Obviously not everyone is ready for that and in that frame of mind. Some are ready and some are less ready.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Hon. Yvon Charbonneau: There are some who do not even listen when someone is talking. That shows just how much they prefer making noise to listening to what we say on this side.

The House of Commons should be a place where there is an ongoing public debate, a thorough and calm examination of the great issues we face in this country, and not a place where people who are not equipped to take power or do not even aspire to it take pot shots at one another and indulge in petty politics. Some parties act like lobby groups.

People watching us last night were also very impressed because our government has decided to not only make promises, but to put its words into action. For instance, the government provided \$2 billion last week for health care and agreed to meet with the premiers this summer to come up with viable solutions to our health care problems.

Politicians, whether at the provincial or the federal level, all realize that money alone is not the solution in the area of health care. We need to find new ways to work together and further promote cooperation. A lot of work remains to be done. This summer, the first ministers will review the situation and try to come to an agreement on new ways to make our health system viable in the long term. The goal is to avoid any more emergency infusions of billions of dollars.

Another example is the government's commitment to immediately provide municipalities with full relief from the portion of the goods and services tax they now pay. The government is also prepared to work with the provinces to find a way to help finance some of their most critical needs, which have to do with municipal infrastructures throughout the country.

The people were impressed to see that we were not willing to wait two months, until the next budget or the next election, to make good on our promises. The Prime Minister said, "Start counting now, the money has started to come in as of February 1". These are not merely promises, they are commitments already being acted on. The people were very impressed with how our Prime Minister and our government were working.

Also, they were thrilled with some of the measures affecting young people, including the increased access to registered education savings plan, particularly for poorer Canadians, and also the modernized Canada Student Loans program for the less fortunate students.

•(1640)

Companies that are part of the social economy were a special focus of the Speech from the Throne. This is the first time, I think, in the history of Canada or one of its provinces, that the emerging social economy sector has received so much attention.

Aide domestique in northeast Montreal is an agency that employs dozens of people. In the Montreal east area, services are offered to seniors and people who sometimes rely on not-for-profit agencies. There are 11 similar agencies in Montreal that employ some 500 people. There are 103 of them in Quebec in the social economy field, in several sectors.

This is very important for the harmonious functioning of our society and our community. They work with seniors, young children and families. They work for NPOs or cooperatives, and, according to the Speech from the Throne, they can benefit from measures comparable to those available to small businesses. This represents considerable progress and much-deserved recognition of all those who are continually working hard for the well-being of our society.

We welcome our Prime Minister's commitments with respect to sustainable development and the environment. All these commitments cannot be listed in a few short minutes. However, we must highlight those that, in our view, are key to the future; we are talking about sustainable development and the environment.

In the Speech from the Throne, an entire series of measures was announced. We will go beyond Kyoto—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Hon. Yvon Charbonneau: For the eternal skeptics in the recesses of this House who say that the government hesitates when it comes to respecting its commitments to the Kyoto protocol, the Prime Minister said we will go beyond Kyoto. These are firm measures.

The Prime Minister also said we would not just hold forth on the international stage and participate in protocols and major agreements; we will start by putting our own house in order. That is a sincere promise, not just a general statement.

We are going to undertake a 10-year, \$3.5 billion program to clean up contaminated sites. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development has been recommending for years that the government take the initiative; now it has. Firm commitments have been made.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Hon. André Harvey: The Bloc is not included in that. The Bloc will be taken care of in the election.

The hon. Yvon Charbonneau: As my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord says, there are two kinds of contaminated sites; those for which there are environmental solutions and those that require an election.

There are thousands of contaminated federal sites in Canada and numerous studies have been done over the years. We are now ready to go forward and to deal with the problems that have been identified. This will also affect sites like the Sydney tar ponds that

The Address

have been widely explored and analysed for years. Millions of dollars have been set aside for that purpose.

The situation is the same for abandoned mines like the one in Yellowknife and many others in Canada's far north. These are important measures because we are dealing with fragile ecological environments that deserve our attention.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The hon. Yvon Charbonneau: Some people are not really interested of course, because these are measures that they themselves had asked for and that have suddenly become unacceptable when the government took the lead. These people are not serious. They like to play politics.

Also with respect to the environment, the Prime Minister made a commitment that he had already put forward when he was critic for the Liberal opposition, 12 or 13 years ago, and that he reiterated as Minister of Finance, which had to do with using environmental indicators in major government decisions.

•(1645)

These were environmental indicators for the air, for emissions and for the quality of our water.

Our government is not guided strictly by financial criteria. Environmental criteria are also now part of the decision-making process, following the national round table on the environment and the economy. These are major steps forward.

The throne speech includes other commitments on the marketing of innovative and environmentally friendly technologies. Such technologies exist all across the country. There is a huge potential. The marketing process was undertaken a few years ago. It will be more sustained in the coming months and years.

I should also tell the House how pleased we are to see the commitments made by the government to develop our skills, our human resources. For the past number of years, the government has been focusing on this area. This commitment is firmly renewed in the throne speech. We are talking about our human resources. In particular, there is a very specific commitment by the government to better integrate new immigrants into our economy and our communities. Immigrants are not a problem in Canada. They should not be. On the contrary, they are the solution to a number of our problems in the future, provided some changes are made. We must recognize the skills of those who come to Canada.

There are people who were trained abroad and who have Ph.D.s and masters degrees. They come here, but the professional corporations, the provinces and the administrations do not recognize their degrees. They end up driving taxis. We need cab drivers, but not to the point of relying on people who have Ph.D.s and masters degrees, and who are trained to be doctors to do the job.

The Address

We must recognize the skills of these people. We must also, in other cases, facilitate the updating or upgrading of their skills. In my view, these are very concrete commitments that were well understood and appreciated by people like the residents of Montreal, particularly in the eastern part of Montreal, in my riding of Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies.

The people who were there included many who were of Hispanic, Arab, Haitian or Asian origin. They saw in these words a message of hope, a policy of open arms and humanity that truly warmed their heart. Such was the effect of the throne speech on people.

I would also like to applaud two other initiatives of the government. There is the creation of an organization that will be called Canada Corps and that will allow our young graduates to acquire valuable international experience when they are 20, 22, 23 or 25 years old. Not only will they acquire meaningful experience, but, at the same time, they will get first-hand experience in international cooperation by participating in projects that will help countries targeted by this organization.

I think this is one of the most promising projects. Indeed, when these young people will have participated in these projects overseas for six months, 18 months or two years and will come back in this country, they will be better Canadians and also better citizens on the international level. They will be people who are more aware of the realities and of the need to get involved to contribute to a better world on the international level.

Everyone is talking about globalization. We should humanize it, give it a human face. As soon as they come back, these young Canadians who are 20, 22 or 25 years old, who will have acquired this experience, will contribute to Canadian politics and to our society in a more humane, social and fair manner. This proposal is extremely promising.

I also saw the government's commitment to work more with unions, with major Canadian unions that are particularly involved in the skill development sector. This work with unions is considered an essential component of our training and skill development system. This kind of commitment is quite something. We heard our Prime Minister make this commitment.

•(1650)

There are so many reasons to applaud this Speech from the Throne that some people would inevitably blame me for not saying enough. However, they are so inspiring and meaningful that they got enthusiastic support from all the people who took part in the meeting last night and from all the people who expressed their satisfaction.

Through their attitudes, their applause and their welcome, they expressed their confidence in the government, in our new Prime minister and also, I must admit, in your humble servant, who was seeking a nomination to represent their riding in the next federal election.

[*English*]

Mr. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but be enthused with the tremendous report that the hon. member has reflected from his own province. I see from the floor opposite the enthusiasm that members of other parties have toward

the throne speech. I would like to comment briefly on health care which was part of the member's speech.

Across Canada we see a tremendous shortage of health care workers in the future. In my own province of New Brunswick there are many local concerns that we do not have general practitioners available to look after the many families in our province. Earlier this afternoon we heard a speech from an hon. member from Newfoundland who talked about education. Next week some medical students are coming to Ottawa to meet with us to discuss the future of training and education for future doctors in our country.

Would the hon. member comment briefly on the future of health care? What opportunities does he see to improve our health care system? Our government in the throne speech was certainly behind that initiative. We want to see a better health care service in which all people have ready access for their medical needs.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Yvon Charbonneau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question on health care.

I have already had the privilege of being the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, and I closely considered these issues a few years ago. It is now clear that health is the top priority in Canada, a fact that the federal, provincial and territorial governments are unanimous on.

In any given region in Quebec or elsewhere, health is the basis of every discussion. It is the main concern.

At any meeting with seniors or other groups, health rapidly becomes the basis of discussions and concerns. People want reassurance.

Often, we talk about security. There is now a Minister of Public Safety in Canada, and I am that minister's parliamentary secretary. The main concern currently is not borders or terrorism, which still are part of the whole, but health.

People want to know what care they can expect for themselves, their children, their families and their parents, no matter what their age or their condition. That is the first insecurity that needs to be addressed.

Last week, the first ministers and the federal Prime Minister agreed to meet again over the summer, specifically to discuss measures to be taken in the medium and long term. We know that these problems cannot be solved merely by throwing a billion here, and a billion there. Sometimes this is even counter-productive, because purchases are made despite the fact that the human resources to operate the equipment are not available.

My colleague is right to point out that young professionals, health professionals in particular, are increasingly open to the idea of training leading to a new concept, a new practice of medicine, including a preventive aspect, which they would like to see more developed than it is.

The Address

We have opened up the public health field. We all heard in the throne speech how much emphasis was placed on that. There is a Minister of State for Public Health, a system that is at the preparation stage. Public health is essentially prevention, not waiting for disease to strike but taking pre-emptive action by looking at what living conditions, hygiene and diet we can have to avoid later health problems.

Young health practitioners are increasingly open to the idea of training in this area.

All of the initiatives to which my colleague has referred will be totally productive for the health system in the medium term.

• (1655)

Hon. André Harvey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to commend my hon. colleague who, despite the heckling by our colleagues from the Bloc, was able to remain dignified and explain in some detail the key issues raised in the throne speech.

He told the House about the initiatives for our communities. God knows how pressing the need was to help improve the financial situation of our municipalities. He talked about research and development. He mentioned the review of our foreign policy, especially through CIDA and its initiatives.

He expanded on the new initiative, called Canada Corps, to help young Canadians participate in an international program that would make them better citizens of the world, thanks to the hands-on experience gained in the field.

I would also like to put a question to my hon. colleague. I want to come back to an element of the throne speech which is crucial to the future of our country and which was barely covered by the media, that is the new approach to the social economy. I know for a fact that this reflects the reality people face in each of our ridings. It did not always get significant support from the various levels of government.

People involved in the social economy sector will now have access to the wide scope of programs available from our various departments. However, the throne speech does point out that, during the upcoming year, the government will be focussing on developing new initiatives to support the work of these people. I would like the hon. member to tell us what he foresees in terms of support for to all those in the social economy sector.

Hon. Yvon Charbonneau: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord for the opportunity to return to this aspect of the throne speech.

It is rather unusual for a throne speech to place such importance on a sector like that. We are talking about big business, productivity, international competition, technology. In all the throne speeches, in all the political commitments, in all the speeches from opposition leaders, the same major themes keep coming up. There is one, however, that is not often heard except from this side of the House, but it was clearly mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, and that is the social economy.

At first glance, for people who have not yet taken the time to examine this concept, it might seem rather contradictory. Usually, we

keep social measures, economic measures, and environment and health measures separate, and that is how it is. The social economy is a concept that is just emerging, that is receiving more and more attention in our society. Briefly, it is a fabric, a web, of small organizations. Right now they are small organizations, but sometimes they can be a little bigger, with 50, 75 or 100 employees.

These organizations work with people. They help meet community needs or the needs of groups, such as underprivileged children, seniors, people unable to cut their grass or shovel snow, clean their windows or clean their apartment because they are sick or disabled.

There are all kinds of formulas, such as recycling plastics or dangerous goods; all kinds of companies are emerging in this broad sector of the social economy.

There are opportunities for some to privately provide these services and earn a profit, but when we talk about the social economy, we talk about non-profit organizations—NPOs—or cooperatives. They hire people and provide services at low cost to those who need them; they provide jobs for people who provide services that the private sector does not, which also gives these services a human quality. They are close to local needs. This is an emerging sector, a new sector.

The throne speech demonstrated incredible sensitivity. It is extremely avant-garde. The government says that it has identified this sector and that it will do more than just watch it, encourage it, congratulate it and award medals; it will take concrete action to help these people and give them recognition. It is also a sign of recognition for the entire volunteer sector within the social economy.

• (1700)

Mr. Christian Jobin (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question concerning municipal infrastructure.

We all know too well that, in the last few years, municipalities have had some difficult choices to make. Of course, they maintained their primary services, like garbage collection, snow removal, and so on. But right now, there is a hidden deficit in terms of municipal infrastructure.

I would like the hon. member to tell the House what the government said in the throne speech about how they are going to help municipalities improve their infrastructure.

Some hon. members: There is nothing!

Hon. Yvon Charbonneau: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. I heard a member opposite say, "There is nothing". However, there is a small word, deal, mentioned in connection with our municipalities. They might think it is nothing. It is a deal we want to make with the municipal governments. It is very important to us, although it might not mean anything to the members opposite

Second, it is important to mention that we want to make a deal, but without infringing upon provincial jurisdictions. We are very much aware of the incredible needs of the larger municipalities as well as a lot of smaller ones in terms of infrastructure, sewer systems, water supply, communications, and so forth.

The Address

Full relief from the portion of the goods and services tax municipalities now pay is a first step in the right direction. It comes into force right away, not just after the upcoming budget. It has been in force since February 1. This deal will lead to other measures. A deal is an agreement between partners. It is not a federal government order by which provinces and municipalities have to abide. It is an agreement. I do hope that all the parties in this House will recognize the merits of such an agreement and process and will support them.

[English]

Hon. Jean Augustine (Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne.

I am particularly proud to be Minister of State for Multiculturalism and Status of Women. I cannot think of a position that I would rather be in as I look at the words in the Speech from the Throne.

I have always been passionate about multiculturalism, equality and human rights. I have devoted my life to creating a better world where women and men from all backgrounds feel they are accepted and valued.

It is a great moment to be the minister responsible for Canadian multiculturalism and belong to a government that continues to cherish and value diversity as a fundamental ethic of Canadian society. I am pleased to underscore that February is Black History Month, a time when we recognize the many achievements and contributions of black Canadians who have done so much to make this nation what it is today.

This year marks the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Mathieu Da Costa in 1604, who is believed to be the first person of African heritage to have set foot on our shores. More than 1,000 young people participated in the Mathieu Da Costa challenge this year demonstrating that our youth certainly value diversity.

As the Speech from the Throne states, we want a Canada with strong social foundations where people are treated with dignity, where they are given a hand when needed and where no one is left behind.

I think everyone of us in this chamber wants to ensure that no one is left behind in our society. Moreover, the Speech from the Throne goes on to say that changing the way things work in government will help all Canadians to achieve their goals, starting with strengthening Canada's social foundations.

It means removing barriers to opportunity. This philosophy is given concrete expression in our openness to immigrants and refugees, and as clearly stated in the throne speech, abhorrence of racism. These powerful statements are possible because we, as a society, have held these values for decades.

Our commitment deepened in 1971, when Parliament adopted the multiculturalism policy. Tomorrow, I will have the privilege of tabling the annual report on the operation of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act for 2002-03. It will outline how federal departments and agencies are advancing the values and principles of multiculturalism. It is a document that is full of extraordinary facts,

and indeed there is much about multiculturalism that is extraordinary.

I wonder if members are aware that Transport Canada has adopted a diversity strategy and that the Canada Council for the Arts increased its grants to culturally diverse artists and arts organizations by almost 7% in 2002-03.

I want to share with the House the results of two recent groundbreaking surveys. One of these surveys revealed that 80% of Canadians believe that multiculturalism enhances the value of Canadian citizenship. The other study revealed that the vast majority of the population, 86%, say to us that it has not been discriminated against or unfairly treated. What an achievement. At the same time, we know that some people registered that they have been treated unfairly.

All of this incredible progress has occurred because Canada has laws, like the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, to ensure that the multicultural heritage of all Canadians is valued.

● (1705)

I am living proof that we live in an open and inclusive society. But as long as people express that they have experienced racism and discrimination, we still have work to do. I am confident that the action we have already taken will benefit many generations after us. We must continue to act.

The action plan against racism that we are working on right now will be a powerful way to address the challenges we still face. This plan is a direct result of our international engagement following the world conference against racism held Durban, South Africa in September 2001.

Canada's multiculturalism policy of encouraging people to retain their cultural identity as Canadians is recognized as a model for the world. The action plan against racism is a continuation of this openness and philosophy of diversity.

Thirty 30 years ago Prime Minister Trudeau adopted the multiculturalism policy that led to the adoption of the act in 1988. Today we are celebrating its 15th anniversary.

As one of my predecessors, the former minister of state for multiculturalism and citizenship, the hon. Gerry Weiner, once said about this law:

Gone are the days when multiculturalism was a side show for new Canadians or those labelled as "ethnics". Today's multiculturalism is about removing the barriers of discrimination and ignorance which stand in the way of acceptance and respect.

Gerry Weiner was right. The multiculturalism policy is an all-embracing and adaptable vision for Canada, one that gives us the openness and freedom to take our place on the global stage, while creating the kind of society we want for our children.

We now live in a country where more than 18% of us were born outside of Canada and where more than 13% of us are visible minorities. In urban centres, this figure is much higher.

The new deal for cities outlined in the Speech from the Throne is designed to help our communities become more dynamic, and more culturally rich and cohesive. This in turn will make them stronger partners in building Canada's social foundations.

The Address

I look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure that the cities' agenda includes all the urban multicultural strategy that supports inclusive institutions, and dynamic and cohesive communities.

With the increasing diversity of our population, Canadians understand more than ever that the task of nation building is not dependent solely upon political and economic structures. It is profoundly influenced by the social and the cultural relationships between communities within our society and by their participation in that society.

It is important to say that government is committed to gender equality, as affirmed strongly in the Speech from the Throne.

It reflects the priorities of women in Canada in all their diversity, priorities fundamental to equality, ensuring we can contribute to every aspect of the life of our country.

The commitment to gender equality is essential to strengthening Canada's social foundations. Canadians want a government that fully and truly engages them, reflecting their unique perspectives and shared strengths, as women and men. Gender equality is a goal we all share. Gender equality is key to economic and social success. And gender equality is central to effective government.

This is why we have been working on an agenda for gender equality, a framework that helps the Government of Canada to incorporate a gender perspective in its policy development, promoting understanding of the benefits of equality and engaging citizens.

• (1710)

The Speech from the Throne reinforces the government's commitment to gender equality. We were pleased by the clear statement that was made in the Speech from the Throne on the issue of gender equality because it is a commitment that the agenda for gender equality facilitates.

The future of our children is Canada's future. This has an impact on women as both parents and caregivers. The Government of Canada is committed to investing in the future of our children, particularly aboriginal children, ensuring that they get the best start in life, protecting them from exploitation and abuse, and supporting them in lifelong learning.

The government will improve access to quality health care, and build stronger and safer communities. These are concerns close to the hearts of many women for whom violence can be a daily reality.

The Speech from the Throne highlights the new recognition that our social and economic goals are inseparable. A stronger economy requires stronger social foundations, and economic strength and a more equitable society are clearly linked.

The government has committed to supporting new approaches to community development, known as "social economy". That support further recognizes the contributions of women in improving the social conditions of their communities and in building a strong and vibrant social economy that meets people's diverse needs.

I will close with two thoughts. When the multiculturalism policy was adopted 33 years ago by the Right Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, he stated:

A policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework is basically the conscious support of individual freedom of choice. We are free to be ourselves.

But this cannot be left to chance. It must be fostered and pursued actively. If freedom of choice is in danger for some ethnic groups, it is in danger for all.

The Right Hon. Pierre Trudeau's words ring true today as they did 33 years ago.

Whether one is talking about strengthening Canada's cities, strengthening our social foundations, strengthening our economy or our standing in the world, multiculturalism and gender equality will continue to play an important role in our government's plans for the future.

This week the government pledged to ensure that every citizen has a strong voice and can contribute to building our nation. More than half of those voices belong to women. They must have every opportunity to improve their lives and participate in securing Canada's future.

I call on all of my colleagues to support the Speech from the Throne, the ideas expressed therein and let us work for quality of life for all of our citizens, men and women.

• (1715)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that when I read the throne speech—although there were some platitudes and clichés about the history of multiculturalism, the role that multiculturalism plays and the importance that we place on multiculturalism—it belied the reality of the role of government.

As the critic for multiculturalism for my party, over the last year I had the opportunity to repeatedly hear complaints from the visible minority community in particular in this country that the government had not moved on the protocols that we signed onto at Durban. In fact, the plan of action that was required both in terms of legislation and policy that needed to be implemented in this country had not been followed.

I would like to ask the minister, is there a plan of action that will implement the recommendations coming out of Durban?

Hon. Jean Augustine: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by complimenting the member for the work he does and for the attention he pays to the visible minority communities. I know that his neck of the woods is a very crucial and important part of our history.

At the same time it is important for him to know that we are in the process of getting an action plan ready for the House and for Canadians. Before we went to Durban, we went around the country and consulted with Canadians. We consulted with civil society. We consulted with groups and organizations. They have given us a plan and their commitment on what they think would be the best way for Canadians to interact and to ensure that racism, hate, discrimination, xenophobia and all those things that happen and create havoc in society will not exist.

The Address

Having heard from Canadians, we are in the process of getting our plan ready. We are doing what is important, which is the consultation before we set out a plan of action. At this point in time my departmental officials and I are working very diligently to ensure that we have a plan of action which we will bring to Canadians.

Hon. David Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the minister on her speech about a half hour ago celebrating the start of Black History Month.

Could she perhaps add something to what she has already said about her hopes and dreams for newcomers to Canada, not of origin in Europe, and particularly women?

Hon. Jean Augustine: Mr. Speaker, I too want to extend the courtesies to my colleague. I know of the work he has done to reassure several groups, including the religious groups, especially after September 11. So many of those groups at that point in time felt that issues in Canadian society were very disturbing to them.

The people who joined us here in Canada traditionally we could say were descendant groups or the immigrant groups. I want to contrast that to the groups who are joining us today. The groups who are joining us today are coming from Asia, from Africa and from places where the individuals are people of colour, the visible minorities. We can refer to them as emerging groups in our society. In certain areas we have to pay special attention to language. We have to pay special attention to religious beliefs. We have to ensure that the multiculturalism policy responds to the needs and concerns as they join us in Canadian society.

We speak about social cohesion. We talk about cross-cultural communication. Those are the pillars and themes of the work we do in the multiculturalism program. It is very important for us to say to new people who are joining us that they are now participating members of Canadian society and therefore share the values that we hold, the values of inclusiveness, of respect for diversity. Those are the values we hold.

We welcome them. At the same time we recognize with the statistics before us that by the year 2011 we will be completely dependent on immigration for our labour force. When we welcome them we have to ensure that everyone joining us in Canadian society is included and is given that equal opportunity to participate.

• (1720)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the minister responsible for the status of women for holding on to her position in the new cabinet at a time when many other women lost their places. I wish her well in the challenging days ahead.

I particularly wish her well given the challenges posed to her by the absence of any concrete reference to status of women issues in the Speech from the Throne. It is interesting to note how invisible women are in that road map. Women just do not seem to have a place in the future direction as envisaged by the government. In fact, it is interesting that the word "woman" was only mentioned twice just in passing.

We have some big challenges ahead of us, especially in terms of Canada's failure to comply with the convention on the elimination of discrimination against women.

As a starting place I would like to ask the minister if she would support the notion of having a parliamentary standing committee on the status of women. It is something that more and more women from all sides of the House are talking about and proposing. We would like to advance that idea with the hope that the House leaders would agree and that all parties would come together with the formation of such a standing committee, so that we would have a permanent place for discussing women's issues and a forum for dealing with many of our failures to live up to UN obligations.

Would the minister responsible for the status of women support that idea? Could she give us her commitment to help us ensure that it comes to pass?

Hon. Jean Augustine: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has such concern for the status of women and works diligently in that area.

I want to say to her that it is important that we work together. It is important for us to recognize that this is not an ideological question but it is a way in which all of us as women and all of us as members in the House should be working together to improve the status of women. Any avenue that would give us that opportunity for exchange is one that should be encouraged.

The Speech from the Throne gave us clear indications as to the government's commitments to women. I could cite instances of aboriginal women. I could cite instances where we spoke about caregivers. The social and economic agenda definitely will include women. There is also the issue of education. There are so many citations, but were we to extrapolate the word "woman" and other "women", "women", "women", at the same time we must recognize that all of those issues include women. We cannot talk about cities without talking about women. We cannot talk about education without including women. We cannot deal with any of those issues without thinking of who those issues represent.

I want us to continue to work together to ensure that we improve gender equality in this country. I want all of us to work for the improvement and for the status of women.

• (1725)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague for an excellent and eloquent speech.

I probably represent one of the most ethnically diverse ridings in Canada. It depends on how we interpret the Statistics Canada data. When I look at the diversity not only of my constituency but of the greater Toronto area and indeed all of Canada, there is such a wonderful variety of people. We have to reach out and make sure they are all part of our society.

I would like to offer an idea to the Minister of State for Multiculturalism, which is to use four simple words as a motto. Their starting letters are “R-A-C-E”. The “R” stands for respect. We have to respect all Canadians as equal. The “A” stands for accept. We accept everybody as an equal partner and an equal stakeholder in this country. The “C” is for celebrate. We celebrate what is Canadian and the diversity we have. The “E” is for embrace. We embrace what is uniquely Canadian.

I am asking the minister for multiculturalism if she would undertake that, or perhaps I could ask the unanimous consent of the House, that this would be the motto for everything that goes out from the ministry of multiculturalism. The four letters together spell the word “race” and we are all part of the human race.

Hon. Jean Augustine: Mr. Speaker, we have not spelled it out in that fashion, “R-A-C-E”, but at the same time I think everything we do in the multiculturalism program speaks to respect, speaks to diversity and speaks to the fact that we celebrate each other. When we talk about social cohesion, that is what we are talking about. We are talking about all of those issues that take our diversity into consideration.

I like the terms as my colleague put them, respect, accept, celebrate and embrace. As the Minister of State for Multiculturalism I will make sure that I include those words in my vocabulary in that fashion.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

OLDER ADULT JUSTICE ACT

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.) moved that Bill C-439, An Act to establish the office of the Ombudsman for Older Adult Justice and the Canadian Older Adult Justice Agency and to amend the Criminal Code, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, let me start by thanking the member for Prince Edward—Hastings, the member for Huron—Bruce, the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex and the member for Calgary East who agreed to be recognized as co-sponsors of the bill.

In October 2002 I was approached by civic leaders in my constituency of Sudbury as well as older adult advocates asking what the federal government was doing at the national level to deal with the problems of older adult abuse, neglect and exploitation. I was saddened to say that not enough was being done to deal with this issue. It is an issue that is hidden from the public. Its victims are often cloaked in secrecy and shame.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

It is in order to deal directly with the problem that I have decided to put this bill together. I have no illusions. In its present format, the bill will not be passed in its entirety. In fact, members of the seniors

Private Members' Business

community are opposed to some aspects of the proposed measures, but there are other aspects that they would like to see added or clarified.

That is certainly fair. I think that the bill has to be based on a co-ordinated approach arrived at through consensus. It must be non-partisan and there must be serious and dynamic consultations with seniors in all regions of Canada.

[*English*]

I know that the Prime Minister's task force on active living and seniors, being chaired by my colleague, the member for Trinity—Spadina, will be extremely productive and forthright in its deliberations. I hope they take note of my bill and join with me in putting together a plan of action to combat this issue. It is incumbent upon us as parliamentarians to take action. Older adults are a growing population in Canada, who will by the year 2041 number at least 23% of our total population. That is one out of every four.

What does this mean for the federal government? It means we have to look at ways to ensure we have the necessary national institutions in place to deal with an older population, an older population that despite its age has the abilities and strengths to continue to contribute to this country's future. We must do our part to foster and promote this contribution.

However, we must be cognizant of the fact that within our population there are those in the older adult community who are unfortunately targeted as victims of crime, based solely on their age or their perceived infirmities. This stigma is shameful and yet it is a stigma that some in this country have been willing to attach to this sector of Canada for far too long.

However, stigmas are, after all, just that: false perceptions, false ideas, and false truths. They must be confronted, combatted and slapped down. I am seeking to do just that with this bill.

Research and awareness of the issue of older adult abuse is relatively recent, as it was only raised in the House in the early 1980s. In fact, 21 years ago this March, a member of this chamber by the name of J.R. Howie brought this issue to the fore through a bill entitled “An Act respecting Senior Citizens”. Like me, Mr. Howie saw a need for intervention by the federal government to address the inadequate attention to the needs of the elderly.

As all members are aware, abuse comes in a variety of forms, including physical, emotional, financial and sexual abuse as well as psychological abuse, and is carried out at times by those that older adults trust the most. It can be categorized under three main themes: abuse and neglect in domestic settings, abuse and neglect in institutional settings, and self-abuse and neglect, which occurs when adults live in ways that disregard their health or safety needs.

Private Members' Business

Studies recognize that older adult abuse is a significant problem that impacts on the quality of life of many seniors across Canada. Indeed, going as far back as 1989 to the national survey on abuse of the elderly in Canada, it was shown that at least 4% of Canadians over the age of 65 suffer some sort of abuse, whether it is at the hands of family members or others. The study found that financial abuse accounted for more than 50% of the cases, while 30% were cases of verbal aggression. Physical abuse ranked third.

The Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey for the year 1999 found that older adults aged 65 or older represent 2% of all victims of violent offences and were 67% more likely to be victimized by non-family members. Additionally it was found that common assault was the most reported violent offence against older adults, followed by uttering threats and assault with a weapon. It was also found that older adults were the victims of 9.5% of all homicides, 8.3% of all extortion cases, and 6.1% of all reported cases of robbery in the year 2000.

Let me stress that these statistics represent only reported cases. I have been told by law enforcement officials as well as advocates that there are countless other cases that go unreported because victims are too ashamed to come forward.

I could go on, but in the interest of time, I want to get to the proposals in the bill.

● (1735)

As proposed in part 1 of the bill, I believe we need to seek the establishment of Canada's first ever ombudsman for older adult justice. The mandate of this individual would be to act as a neutral and objective sounding board, mediator and investigator in all matters relating to older adult abuse, neglect and exploitation.

One of the prime reasons for such a position at the federal level would be to collect and disseminate on an annual basis the data relating to older adult abuse and exploitation. Further, with such a range of federal programs, such as the family violence prevention program, I am certain that there exist gaps that need to be addressed in order to develop a coherent older adult abuse prevention policy. An ombudsman could identify and suggest strategies to address these gaps to maximize program effectiveness.

In addition, by having a federal ombudsman who is an expert in older adult advocacy, we as a government could work cooperatively with him or her to develop a long term strategic plan for dealing with the prevention, detection, evaluation and improvement of the older adult justice system.

In conversations with the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, it has been suggested that an expanded ombudsman's mandate could include the areas of old age pension, affordable housing, age discrimination, and other areas of federal involvement in the lives of Canada's older adults. I am open to this suggestion and believe examining this through hearings and at committee would be a worthwhile project.

The second proposal in the bill is the development of the Canadian older adult justice agency. The goal of this agency would be to develop and implement, in cooperation with the provinces and stakeholders, older adult justice policies and programs. It would serve as a depository and institute of specialized information on the

issue of older adult abuse, neglect and exploitation. By putting in place such an agency, we would over time be developing the government's capacity to learn more about this serious problem and to develop long term and viable strategies to combat it.

That said, I want the agency to go even further. I have consistently heard two main points made by those in favour of my legislation as well as from some who are opposed. One is the need for proper and sustained funding to older adult programs and advocacy groups across the country. The second is the need to develop a training program, or at least an enhanced training program, for law enforcement officials, counsellors, long term care workers and others in how to recognize, deal with and be sensitive to incidents of older adult abuse.

These two things have consistently emerged as necessary for one simple reason: if we do not fund programs that are put in place, then they prove to be ineffective and a waste of taxpayer money. Frankly, advocacy groups deserve more, as do Canada's older adults. The message is clear: proper and sustained funding is imperative to the success of programs and the work of national advocacy groups.

Under the umbrella of the agency, I am also proposing that we develop a long term care consumer database to provide Canadians with information and data on older adult homes across Canada. Individuals, whether they are an older adult or the adult child or a relative or friend or guardian, deserve to know the type of care and the level of service that can be expected at any given rest home.

I think all of us have read the recent horror stories in *The Toronto Star* about a 94 year old woman who, due to poor care and neglect, wound up with serious bed sores, covered in her own filth, and was left to die with gangrene eating away at her. It is graphic, I know that, but let me tell members that there are many other instances as well.

As colleagues will recall, CTV reported in January the case of 90 year old Jennie Nelson, a resident of the Jubilee Lodge in Edmonton, who died as a result of second degree burns to body. How did she get these? By being immersed in a scalding hot bath.

● (1740)

This is not simply outrageous. It is insulting and demeaning in a country that prides itself on compassion.

I myself one day may need to use the services of such a home, as perhaps will many others in this chamber as well. Do we want the same level of care that Ms. Nelson received? No. She deserved better and so do all Canadians.

By putting in place this agency with a long term care database as part of its core responsibility, Canadians can have a focal point of information on what to expect in our long term care homes.

Private Members' Business

I know we will hear the usual provincial grumbling that it is a jurisdictional issue. Excuse me, but where the health and safety of Canadians is affected, then the federal government has every right to play a role. It is time for us as a federal government to put a little steel in our spine and show some leadership on this issue.

The third part of the bill deals with changes to the Criminal Code. I have worked in close consultation with seniors' advocates, attorneys and the chief of the city of greater Sudbury's police services to draft these changes, changes that all agreed were necessary. I take them at their word. They are, after all, the ones on the ground dealing with these issues as they arise.

At present, section 718.2(a)(ii) makes reference to a spouse, a common law partner and a child. I want to expand the category of victims to include those that may require care of any sort due to age or infirmity. This would ensure that these individuals are officially protected under the Criminal Code and sends a clear message to those who would seek to abuse their position of trust. If they are providing care to a person, old or young, vibrant or infirm, they have a duty and an obligation to set for themselves higher standards of responsibility. Should they choose to breach that trust, they will be held fully accountable.

The other change to the Criminal Code would ensure that, in sentencing, the courts consider whether or not an individual has been targeted specifically due to their age or due to their physical or mental vulnerability. While it is true that this is mentioned already to some degree in section 718.2(a)(i), I believe that making clear reference to older adults in the code would enhance their rights and would ensure parity across the country when it comes to the sentencing of those that target the elderly or the vulnerable.

In closing, let me say that I believe this bill represents a discussion point on an effective national strategy for Canada's older adults and combatting older adult abuse.

[*Translation*]

I would like everybody in this House to know that I recognize that the bill could be rejected in its present format, that parts of the bill are not perfect and should be reviewed. I see no problem with that. However, I would like to see my colleagues from all sides participate in good faith in the process and ensure that the bill makes it to committee stage, where it can be reviewed, where hearings can be held and where representatives of the seniors community and their advocates can tell us parliamentarians what they would like to see in a bill to protect seniors' rights.

• (1745)

[*English*]

Our task as parliamentarians is to seek consensus as we move forward, to stand together to confront the scourge of older adult abuse, and to put the rights of our oldest citizens at the top of the national priority list.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my appreciation to the member for Sudbury for bringing forth this issue.

Reams and reams of paper come across my desk every week, but when I saw this bill, it tweaked my interest, so I requested to have a few minutes to speak on this. However, I have some questions.

Maybe I will date myself by some of my questions and some of my thoughts as I go into this, but this is private members' business. We talk about things in private members' business and we raise issues that normally do not come across in Parliament. That is one of the reasons I appreciate this, and what we say does not reflect necessarily on our political party.

When we were growing up, I remember that abuse of aging parents was virtually unheard. Grandparents and aging parents were very seldom sent off to homes pass away. Families, churches and charities looked after aging parents for as long as they were physically able to do so.

The question I have is this. Because we are discussing the whole issue of abuse and taking care of elderly people, how can we maybe step back again and encourage families, churches and charities to once again assume a little more responsibility for this?

I reflect on this and I wonder—and I do not know how to say this in a different way—if Liberal social engineering has diluted everyone in society into thinking government can solve all our problems. Does big government have to look after all this? Maybe this is not what the member is getting at, but we have a problem here. I know we have been taxed and we have a debt of half a trillion dollars now. Maybe we have removed the financial wherewithal from families, charities and other organizations in the community to do something about it.

Would the member like to broaden the discussion in this way? I really appreciate the fact she has brought this forward, and these are some of my thoughts and questions as to whether another big government program would get at some of the root causes of this.

Hon. Diane Marleau: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. Years ago we did not hear about abuse of older adults, but I believe that it occurred back then, as well.

I remember living near a family where the grandmother was kept. I remember the children, who were my age, going up and slapping the grandmother. I was horrified at the way she was treated in this home. Therefore, I know from personal contact that it did occur, but nobody ever spoke of it.

I want to encourage families to look after themselves. However, it is very important that one of the points of having a project such as this one is to bring out into the open the issue of abuse of seniors. It is family violence. If members remember way back when, we did not hear too much about family violence. It certainly was occurring, but it was hidden, and it was shameful. We need to bring it out in the open.

Nowadays families are more broken up. There are not such large families any more. The children move away. They do not necessarily live in the same community as their parents do. Many people do not have children. These people end up alone, very vulnerable and often are taken advantage of.

Private Members' Business

This bill came in response to a number of incidents in my own riding and discussions that I had with law enforcement officers and others.

What I really want to stress is, yes, there needs to be more work done and there probably needs to be some more spending. However, it does not necessarily have to be a great big, expensive program. It is a question of better spending what we are spending now and having an ombudsman or a point person to whom the seniors community can turn when it does not know where else to turn.

• (1750)

Mr. Garry Breitreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her answer to my question and I really would like to sincerely work on this issue. If this goes to committee, I hope I can be part of it, and I appreciate the opportunity she has given us to discuss this whole thing.

Bill C-439 recognizes the fact that older adults are often vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and neglect. The principles of the bill include the prevention and treatment of this problem. It also includes, for the purpose of sentencing, the vulnerability of the older adult victim as an aggravating circumstance under the Criminal Code. These principles, I believe, are generally sound and worthy of support.

Members of the official opposition have been very vocal on the protection of children under the law. It follows that we should be also protective of elderly people. We should invest in the just treatment of the elderly and in some cases an equally vulnerable group of people.

However, the creation of a new government agency raises issues of cost and encroachment on provincial jurisdiction. I realize the member has talked about this and does not want to see this happen, but the overall objective of the bill is worth supporting. I want to underline that I am supporting the overall objective of the bill.

However, I believe it may not be necessary for a new government agency to be established in order to achieve this objective. Before we could support legislation creating a brand new bureaucracy, members of Parliament would have to know exactly how the ombudsman proposed in the bill and the older adult justice agency would fit in with all of the other services provided for the elderly.

For example, the federal government and the provinces have been working on this issue for a number of years. I would like to quote from a news release issued by Health Canada on June 27, 2002, following a meeting of federal-provincial-territorial ministers responsible for seniors. Item 4 in the release was specifically "Addressing Elder Abuse". The minister stated:

Research indicates that the abuse of older adults is a hidden problem as reported cases only represent the "tip of the iceberg". Older adults are often reluctant to report abuse due to fears of retaliation, shame, family loyalty, abandonment and institutionalization. Therefore, continuing attention to public education is important. Ministers have requested further analysis on existing elder abuse strategies and legislation across jurisdictions in Canada. The analysis will continue their collaborative efforts to address the safety and security needs of seniors by identifying priority strategic initiatives for potential action, for governments who so desire.

I put that into the record because it appears that much of what is proposed in the private member's bill may already be being done.

That does not mean that we should not discuss that here, but I think that we have to make sure that we are not duplicating things.

Health Canada's division of aging and seniors provides federal leadership in areas pertaining to aging and seniors. The division serves as a focal point for information and the centre of expertise and some of its activities include:

—providing advice and supporting policy development; conducting and supporting research and education activities; encouraging innovative means of improving the health of seniors in situations of risk and in preventing situations of risk from developing; working and consulting with partners, including the provinces, territories, seniors organizations and other sectors; and encouraging communication and disseminating information; and providing operational support to the National Advisory Council on Aging.

In executing all of its roles and responsibilities, the Division promotes the meaningful participation of seniors in federal decisions and activities that affect them.

I would also like to quote again, this time from Health Canada's National Advisory Council on Aging. It has been operating for the last 24 years. Its stated purpose is to:

—to assist and advise the Minister of Health on all matters related to the aging of the Canadian population and the quality of life of seniors. These may be matters that the Minister refers to the Council or that the Council considers appropriate.

The Council consists of up to 18 members from all parts of Canada and all walks of life. The members bring to Council a variety of concerns, experiences and abilities. Members are appointed by Order-in-Council for two to three-year terms, renewable once.

Support for the Council's operations is provided by a team of federal public service employees located in Ottawa.

• (1755)

I have some questions for the minister and I do not know when she will have an opportunity to answer them. Would the National Advisory Council on Aging be replaced by the agency and ombudsman proposed in this older adult justice act?

The National Advisory Council on Aging recently published an excellent eight page bulletin entitled "Hidden Harm: the abuse of seniors". On page 8, it provides a list of toll free numbers in every province and territory advising where to get help for seniors experiencing abuse.

Anyone listening to this debate today should be aware that there is some of this already. Hopefully the message will get out that if these abusive situations are taking place, people should already be seeking these numbers and they should be looking for assistance because there is some assistance already available.

I checked out one of these, the province of Manitoba senior's directorate. It provides a senior's abuse line, a senior's information line and it also has a Manitoba Council on Aging. Many provinces have this. It is not clear to me how the ombudsman and the agency proposed in the bill would work with the existing provincial governments and agencies. Do the provinces support the creation of this agency? Will they help finance it? Will the new federal ombudsman and the agency fill a gap in services or will it duplicate existing services? I ask these questions because we all have to answer questions before we vote on a bill.

I do not want to give the minister the impression that because I am asking these tough questions I am not concerned about elder abuse. The exact opposite is true. I realize that it is a severe problem and we need to deal with it. The statistics I have seen show the horror stories in the media and we all should be very concerned about it. However being concerned does not mean that we should automatically create another government agency or bureaucracy, unless we can show that bureaucracy will actually solve the problem. That is what I want to get at. We have to solve this very serious problem.

We have all seen the problems we have got into by passing ill-considered legislation. You know, Mr. Speaker, the legislation we have passed since 1995. I have tracked it since then. We have spent a lot of money. It resulted in the creation of a huge bureaucratic boondoggle and we did not solve the problem of violence in our society. I want to make sure if we are to create some kind of agency, we do not go down that path again.

We all want an agency that will actually result in a reduction in the number of incidents of elder abuse and see that this objective is accomplished in a cost effective manner. I am not convinced that what is being proposed here will produce the results. It will have to go to committee if we approve this.

Again, I thank the member for raising this issue, one of the most important issues in the country. I look forward to working together with her on it. I think many members in our party will support this because it is something that needs to be investigated and it may need to go to committee to ensure that we get it right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the speech from the member and that of my colleague on this very important issue. Everyone knows how concerned I am about the situation of older adults. My role within my party is to defend older adults and to question the government about their situation.

The bill being introduced is full of good intentions, but we cannot support it because, as the member says, it interferes directly with provincial jurisdictions.

I am against having to take multiple steps to complete one task. This is not legislation that is going to protect older adults. In Quebec, we already have a Public Curator, the Conseil des aînés, and the CLSCs, that do roughly what this legislation is asking be done.

When I was an MLA in Quebec, I made it my duty to visit all the retirement homes at least twice a year. I did that for 9 years, which means I did it at least 18 times. I saw the abuse that goes on and I had the opportunity to make changes. However, it is not by implementing another council or another level of protection, legislation or officials that we are going to improve the situation.

Older adults have the right to be informed. It is by giving them information that we will help them, since they already have the Public Curator, the Conseil des aînés and the CLSCs. These agencies already exist in Quebec.

The legislation could be helpful if it made changes to the Criminal Code. That is an area that might need some work. We could rewrite

Private Members' Business

the legislation in order to amend the Criminal Code because it could be flawed with respect to this issue.

This bill explains what constitutes abuse of older adults. The following is the definition provided for abuse:

The knowing infliction of physical, psychological or financial harm on an older adult.

I am scandalized by the introduction of this bill. Yes, there is financial harm. The one most responsible for financial harm is the federal government. It has kept money from at least 270,000 older Canadians. I have travelled across Quebec and in some parts of Canada, including Vancouver. I have met people who are the victims of the government. This does not mean that there are not people as well who financially abuse older people. I know this goes on.

However, when the government itself does not provide the information to ensure that people receive the guaranteed income supplement, when the government itself does not take measures to find these people, even by going door to door to meet the people who are entitled to their money because it is owed to them, when the government does not do so, I think that introducing a bill such as this one will not improve anything.

This is quite simple. There are 270,000 Canadians, including 68,000 Quebecers, who did not receive the guaranteed income supplement. I took part in 37 meetings across Quebec. I met almost all the news media there are and we managed to find people who were entitled to it. The department told me it may have found about 75,000 people that it was looking for, and about 30,000 in Quebec alone. This means that, in Quebec alone, about \$100 million are now in the pockets of the poorest, who need it and who were deprived of it because of the inaction of the federal government.

● (1800)

Let them pass legislation, at any time, to require the federal government to reimburse seniors for the money stolen from them because they were not informed. This is money of which seniors were deprived, and it was used to the government's profit. These seniors were unable to cope, had little education, were alone, sick, abandoned to their own devices, and could not obtain the necessary information. Nothing was done to get it to them. In order to get what was coming to them, these seniors had to make a phone call, talk to a machine, and dial 22 numbers, only to hear that all the lines were busy.

That is how the information was given out. If someone did manage to get hold of an application form, it took an accountant or a lawyer to fill it out. Today I say this: enact legislation that will require the government to do the same for seniors to whom money is owing, as the former finance minister did, for example, for his shipping companies, which have come up again today. A way was found, retroactively, to put money into the pockets of certain individuals.

Private Members' Business

It is true that the seniors I speak for have been abused by this government. That does not mean that the government is alone in doing so. Still, they have been abused by the government and I think that it is criminal that, in their twilight years, because they are ill or do not have much money, or because they simply have no fighting spirit left, they are not given what they deserve, and no one takes care of them, although there are many organizations that could help them.

In Quebec there are the CLSCs and there are golden age clubs. There are many organizations whose sole purpose is to help people. I have dealt with these organizations on my travels around Quebec and I have found some incredible things. For example, I met a woman in Sherbrooke, who has since died, who lived out her senior years on \$6,000 a year: just the old age pension. I calculated that the government saved \$90,000, because of that woman.

In my opinion, legislation is not what we need to correct this. What we need is a little honesty in the system. We must use what we already have. We must use the information that can get to the people who need it. We must make use of the people working in the field who are only too glad to provide assistance. There are service clubs of all kinds and these people are ready to help us.

The Criminal Code needs some amendment, it is true. I said so a moment ago. Still, if it means that the services provided in Quebec are duplicated, I do not agree. Calculations show it is wasted time. Having more discussions at various times is fine; I, too, would like to be called as a witness to talk about it before a commission. I would work until I got back the money owed to those very deserving people. The older generation was here ahead of me; they built this country and they are entitled to our utmost respect.

• (1805)

[*English*]

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too want to say a few words in support of the bill put forward by the member for Sudbury. I congratulate her for doing this.

In case I forget, I want to ask the member to take a look at a bill I drafted and tabled some time ago, Bill C-227. It was a bill to investigate the difficulties encountered by seniors when they deal with the Canada pension plan, the old age pensions and the different tax liabilities. It might be complementary to what she is trying to do. I had some help on that by people who were experts in the field. It might be something worth looking at.

In any event, I do support the bill put forward in the House today. We are an aging society. I just looked at some recent statistics showing that in the year 2000 some 16.7% of our population was over 60 years old. In the year 2050, another 50 years from now, the population over 60 years of age will be 31.9%. In other words, Mr. Speaker, 50 years from now you will be among the oldest one-third of the Canadian population. That will be getting up there in age by that time of course. We are an aging society and the baby boom is going through the cycle.

I suppose one of the deficiencies in our social system has been in making sure our older people, our senior citizens, get a decent, fair and just break in our society.

I have been a member of Parliament now for about 32 years. I was elected in 1968 and was out for one term. I have had my attention drawn many times to elder abuse. It occurs in all kinds of places and forms that we would not expect: abusive families, abuse between spouses, abuse between strangers and elders, and patronizing attitudes toward senior citizens. One sees and hears about it all the time. It is something for which we have to be concerned in terms of discrimination based on age.

One reason for referring the bill to committee for study is that there are all kinds of aspects of how we should be treating senior citizens better which we can study at the same time.

I am glad the member has taken the initiative in this bill to get the ball rolling and establish an ombudsman for older adult justice and the Canadian older adult justice agency and amendments to the Criminal Code. Of course that would include the Prime Minister of Canada as well. We may have to be very careful with how we question him in question period.

I think the bill is a move in the right direction and it is something we should be supporting. It is not right to discriminate against anyone on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, colour, religious background or on the basis of age, and that certainly does occur.

Some day in this country we will have a serious debate on an issue called mandatory retirement. I happen to agree with the Prime Minister of Canada that age 65 should not be a mandatory retirement age. I think that is discrimination based on age. At the same time, we have to make sure that people have adequate pensions so they can make a real choice as to whether they can retire at the age of 65.

We have made progress since the 1930s and 1940s on pensions, on seniors and on poverty, but I do not think that progress has been continuing on in the last 10 or 15 years as it was in the previous 25 or 30 years. It has levelled off. We have a lot of senior citizens living in poverty and below the poverty line.

Those are some of my concerns. We need an improved pension system. We need to improve the Canada pension plan so people will have a more adequate income. Private pension plans have to be more portable. We need to ensure that we have a retirement safety net for people so they can have a decent living and not live in poverty after they retire.

I remember growing up on the Prairies and believing all my life that it was the older people who built Canada, the pioneers who came out to my part of the world, Saskatchewan, which became a province in 1905.

• (1810)

Actually my father was born at the end of 1909. He was one of the last pioneers in this country in terms of filing for a homestead under the homestead act. He had one of the last homesteads in central Saskatchewan.

People of my grandparents' generation born in the last part of the 1800s and into the early 1900s were the real pioneers. They built a country through sweat and tears and hard work. They made many sacrifices and passed on a pretty good country to all of us. It is imperative for us now to make sure we treat our senior citizens with respect and dignity and to provide the financial means to make sure that they can live a decent life.

I am also concerned about adequate health care. We have across the way the sponsor of the bill who is a former minister of health. She knows the challenges in that field and the challenges that we have now. At one time the federal government paid half the cost of health care and the provinces paid half, but now the provinces put up over 80% of the health care cost. This is a big issue. The senior citizens use the health care system more than any other citizen. If we have a squeeze for health care, it is the senior citizens that tend to suffer more than anyone else. We need more money from the federal government for health care as well.

I have mentioned an adequate pension system. I have mentioned the need for more adequate health care and the concern that I have that a lot of people are living in poverty. Those are some of the other issues we have to wrestle with.

The pension issue is a very important one because of the aging of the population. We have to make sure that we can afford to pay adequate pensions for people when they retire, whatever that retirement age should be.

I remember when the member was a cabinet minister. An idea was floated by the Liberal government of the day which was called the seniors benefit package and was part of the present Prime Minister's deficit cutting strategy. The legislation, had it passed, would have done away with the last social program that was specifically there to help seniors, namely the Old Age Security Act. It is thanks to the intense lobby of senior citizens, the public and the opposition that this idea was dropped.

I also remember back in the Mulroney days when the Conservatives wanted to partially deindex old age pensions. There are a couple of Mulroney fans sitting here in the House of Commons, members of the Conservative Party. In the end the Conservatives did that.

I remember when they brought it in. Mulroney was very popular in 1985. There was a big rally here in the House of Commons. I see two Brian Mulroney fans sitting in the House, one from Yorkton—Melville and one from Ontario, two Conservative MPs. In 1985 there was a big rally in the House. A little woman named Madam Denis, who probably stood about 4 feet 10 inches, said in French to the Prime Minister, “Vous avez menti, vous avez menti”. She said to the Prime Minister, “You have lied to us”.

I remember the galvanizing of public opinion at that moment. I think the member for Sudbury became a member in 1988 and this occurred before she came to the House. I remember how the public opinion at that time galvanized and changed because of Madam Denis.

The grey lobby is increasing in size. It is politically a very potent force out there and an important force. The senior citizens should be listened to. When governments have tried to tinker with programs

Private Members' Business

that they hold dear, and I have mentioned a couple of examples, there have been very effective protests by senior citizens. This is something we should pay heed to. They are our constituents and a very important part of our constituency.

The member for Sudbury makes some excellent points in the legislation. One of the points is that there are crimes being committed against seniors. We have heard about different scams and different con artists that prey on seniors, who telephone them with different ideas about where they should put their money. I have had cases where seniors have called my office after being taken by con artists on different schemes. They go after seniors because they feel they are vulnerable. In many cases it is older women who they feel are vulnerable and they take their money.

In summary, I commend the member for Sudbury. We should send the bill to committee. We should study the whole area of how we treat seniors and make sure we have a fair and just society for them in the years that lie ahead.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Sue Barnes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on Bill C-439, the Older Adult Justice Act, introduced by the member for Sudbury.

[*English*]

I would like to thank her for the work she has done.

[*Translation*]

The amendments in the bill propose to establish the office of the Ombudsman for Older Adult Justice and the Canadian Older Adult Justice Agency and to amend the Criminal Code provisions on sentencing.

[*English*]

I would like to assure the House that those of us in the Department of Justice, including the minister and myself, understand that the protection of older adult rights is a serious matter in this country. I listened to all members in the House today and all of us take these rights seriously.

Through the work of the Department of Justice, we hope to attain a balance of the appropriate protection for older adults while maintaining respect for older adults' rights of independence.

Together with the partners that we have in this country, including the provincial and territorial governments, non-government organizations that operate in our community and the private sector itself, the department currently addresses older adult justice issues through strategies that include legal reform, public legal education, information, research and support for various programs and services.

Private Members' Business

These efforts have included involvement in the federal government's family violence initiative and the national crime prevention strategy, as well as involvement in and support for the work of the federal-provincial-territorial ministers responsible for seniors' safety, and the security working group in the interdepartmental committee on aging and seniors' issues.

I note that some of the members in the chamber have referred to these areas. The department also provides leadership for the federal interdepartmental working group, which is very active on safety and security of seniors.

Many other issues addressed by this bill are addressed by current provincial-territorial laws. That has been pointed out earlier today. To date, the provincial-territorial law addresses the interests of older adults in terms of physical and mental states, for example, issues of guardianship, health law, substitute decision making, and even those areas that relate to dying, for example, wills and estate planning.

There are also offences within current provincial-territorial jurisdiction such as an abuse of the power of attorney. Several jurisdictions in Canada have also enacted social welfare or protective legislation to protect older adults who are victims of physical or sexual abuse, mental cruelty, or inadequate care and attention.

In jurisdictions where adult protection and guardianship legislation is in place, there may be statutory adult protection service programs that offer a combination of legal, health and social services interventions. That cooperation is more important as one ages, particularly the integration of activity.

While we agree with the overall goal of Bill C-439, the Department of Justice will not support the bill in its current form because of the unconstitutional nature of this particular bill. The main constitutional question raised by the bill is whether the bill is within Parliament's legislative jurisdiction under section 91 of the Constitution Act, 1867.

Part 1 of Bill C-439 would establish the office of the ombudsman for older adult justice, responsible for promoting the protection of older adult rights, investigating complaints, and referring to the Minister of Justice matters not settled satisfactorily.

Part 2 of the bill would establish the Canadian older adult justice agency, responsible for providing resources to promote the protection of older adult rights, including information on the prevention, detection, assessment, identification and treatment of older adult abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Parliament does not have direct legislative competence over the rights of older persons in relation to adult abuse, neglect or exploitation outside the context of criminal law. Inside the context of criminal law, we do have this power. In fact, Canadians aged 65 and older had low levels of violent victimization. It is about 1.8%, although they account for 12.7% of the population, and I am quoting 2002 statistics.

Aside from the proposed amendments to the Criminal Code, which do not present the jurisdictional issue, Bill C-439 is not a criminal law measure. Instead, the bulk of the bill is outside Parliament's direct legislative jurisdiction.

The creation of an ombudsman for older adult justice and of a Canadian older adult justice agency could be done federally through the exercise of the federal spending power. The courts have recognized that there is a federal spending power even though it is not mentioned specifically in the Constitution.

● (1820)

The courts have held that Parliament may constitutionally direct the expenditure of money outside its area of legislative jurisdiction so long as the spending statute does not amount in substance to a direct regulation of a matter within provincial jurisdiction. We have heard two of the parties mention this problem earlier today.

Much of Bill C-439 could be accomplished as an exercise of the federal spending power. In general, the ombudsman for older adult justice and the Canadian older adult justice agency proposed by this bill perform non-regulatory functions such as examining issues, making reports, collecting and disseminating information and other like aspects.

There are, however, provisions of Bill C-439 that step well beyond the simple exercise of the spending power and over the line into regulation. This is where we have problems of authority and jurisdiction.

For example, subclause 7(8) of the bill purports to give the ombudsman, in the course of conducting an investigation or study, to require any person to furnish information and to produce documents, papers or things.

Subclause 7(11) prohibits people from obstructing the ombudsman in the performance of the ombudsman's duties and functions under the bill.

Subclause 7(12) makes it a summary conviction offence to contravene clause 7 of the bill, including the ombudsman's right to require information and documents in the obstruction prohibition.

The provisions giving the ombudsman the power to compel information and the production of documents and the offence of obstructing the ombudsman cannot be sustained under the spending power. This is an extension. It is well beyond the jurisdiction. These provisions purport to regulate conduct by imposing legal penalties for failure to abide by the act.

The creation of offences as the most coercive of state regulation of conduct is well outside the scope of the spending power exception. The provisions of the bill I have just described are therefore outside Parliament's power to enact.

There is a similar constitutional flaw in the regulation making power contained in subclause 32(2). This subclause purports to authorize the governor in council to make a regulation, making it an offence to contravene the regulation. Here again, the delegation of this power to create offences exceeds the constitutional basis of Bill C-439, which is the federal spending power.

Having said that, there is no doubt that members in this chamber are interested in all those areas that affect seniors. I applaud the member from Sudbury for raising this. It is a good thing that we are standing in the chamber this hour and another hour, hopefully, to debate these issues and highlight the issues that the member, I know, is very concerned about, and all of us are in our communities.

However, it is not just noble principles that we have to debate in the chamber. We are legislators. We have jurisdictional issues and we should work cooperatively with the jurisdiction that has those areas of responsibility to engage all of us in our communities and make things work properly in a way that we can effect change. It is not our job to spend a lot of time where we cannot be the most effective with the time and resources we have available. We should be working within the jurisdictions, even in the most cooperative manner, to the best benefit of all of our constituents.

No one is saying that these rights and obligations in these areas are not of supreme importance in our communities. Obviously, all citizens are valuable in our communities and older citizens are a special responsibility, just as, as another member mentioned, the youngest citizens.

It is our job as legislators to engage and envelope the ideas, the goals and the values that I think the member is getting at. What she is looking for is an envelope of a bill to address the objectives. The situation with the bill and its present context does not meet the

Private Members' Business

jurisdictional requirement to be supported by the government, the justice minister and the justice department.

Constitutional flaws are serious flaws and we should respect them. Having said that, I do respect all members of the House and their ideas. I think further discussion of anything that could benefit our seniors is a worthwhile use of our energy.

● (1825)

I will end by saying to the hon. member that I look forward to the ongoing debate on this issue. I commend her for her work.

[*Translation*]

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

* * *

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed a bill to which the concurrence of the House is desired.

It being 6:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:30 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, February 5, 2004

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Radiocommunication Act

Mr. Bélanger (for the Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec)	171
Bill C-2. Introduction and first reading	171
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	171

Interparliamentary Delegations

Mr. Price	171
Ms. Bulte	171

Income Tax Act

Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	171
Bill C-472. Introduction and first reading	171
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	171

Petitions

Kidney Disease

Mr. Adams	171
-----------------	-----

Stem Cell Research

Mr. Peric	172
-----------------	-----

Marriage

Mr. Shepherd	172
--------------------	-----

Child Pornography

Mr. Shepherd	172
Mrs. Gallant	172

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Gallaway	172
--------------------	-----

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Resumption of Debate on Address in Reply

Mr. Cullen	172
Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	174
Mr. Stoffer	174
Mr. Eggleton	175
Mr. Thompson (Wild Rose)	176
Mr. Crête	176
Mr. Merrifield	177
Mrs. Skelton	180
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	180
Mr. Mills (Toronto—Danforth)	181
Mr. Hanger	183
Mr. Comartin	183
Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	183
Mrs. Skelton	184
Mr. Thompson (Wild Rose)	184
Mr. Stoffer	185
Mr. Bonwick	185
Mr. Moore	186
Mr. Bonwick	188
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	188

Mr. Bonwick	189
Mr. Wilfert	190
Mr. Bonwick	191
Mrs. Yelich	192
Mrs. Tremblay	192
Mr. Bryden	193
Mr. Rocheleau	193
Mr. Bigras	194
Mr. Karygiannis	195
Mr. Comartin	196
Mr. Murphy	196
Mr. Moore	197
Mr. Stoffer	197
Ms. Neville	198
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	199
Mrs. Skelton	199
Mr. Duncan	200

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Chelsea and Cole Rodgers

Ms. Catterall	201
---------------------	-----

Equalization Payments

Mr. Barnes (Gander—Grand Falls)	201
---------------------------------------	-----

Health

Ms. Karetak-Lindell	202
---------------------------	-----

Health

Mr. St-Julien	202
---------------------	-----

Black History Month

Mrs. Jennings	202
---------------------	-----

Jonathan Dockman

Mr. Thompson (Wild Rose)	202
--------------------------------	-----

Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas

Mr. Boudria	202
-------------------	-----

Baie des Chaleurs

Mr. Roy	203
---------------	-----

The Barbarian Invasions

Mr. Binet	203
-----------------	-----

Kelowna

Mr. Schmidt	203
-------------------	-----

Arts and Culture

Ms. Bulte	203
-----------------	-----

African Heritage Month

Mr. Stoffer	203
-------------------	-----

National Suicide Prevention Week

Mr. Loubier	204
-------------------	-----

Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation

Mr. Cuzner	204
------------------	-----

Canadian Light Source	
Mrs. Yelich	204
Regional Development	
Ms. St-Jacques	204
Aboriginal Affairs	
Mr. Duncan	205
Canadian Economy	
Mr. Jobin	205

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Canada Steamship Lines	
Mr. Hill (Macleod)	205
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	205
Mr. Hill (Macleod)	205
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	205
Mr. Hill (Macleod)	205
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	205
Mr. MacKay	205
Mr. Saada	205
Mr. MacKay	206
Mr. Saada	206
Mr. Duceppe	206
Mr. Goodale	206
Mr. Duceppe	206
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	206
Mr. Paquette	206
Mr. Goodale	206
Mr. Paquette	206
Mr. Goodale	206
National Defence	
Mr. Blaikie	206
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	207
Mr. Blaikie	207
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre—Rosedale)	207
Canada Steamship Lines	
Mr. Rajotte	207
Mr. Saada	207
Mr. Rajotte	207
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	207
Government Assistance	
Mr. Solberg	207
Ms. Robillard	207
Mr. Solberg	207
Ms. Robillard	208
Canada Steamship Lines	
Mr. Gauthier	208
Mr. Goodale	208
Mr. Gauthier	208
Mr. Goodale	208
Mr. Duceppe	208
Mr. Goodale	208
Mr. Duceppe	208
Mr. Goodale	208
Mr. Strahl	208

Mr. Goodale	208
Mr. Strahl	209
Mr. Goodale	209
Mr. Jaffer	209
Mr. Goodale	209
Mr. Jaffer	209
Mr. Goodale	209

Electoral Boundaries

Mr. St-Julien	209
Mr. Saada	209

National Defence

Ms. McDonough	209
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre—Rosedale)	209
Ms. McDonough	210
Ms. Sgro	210

Agriculture

Mr. Ritz	210
Mr. Speller	210
Mr. Ritz	210
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	210

National Defence

Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	210
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	210
Mr. Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	210
Mr. Price	210

Social Programs

Mrs. Tremblay	211
Mr. Volpe	211
Mrs. Tremblay	211
Mr. Volpe	211

Veterans Affairs

Mrs. Wayne	211
Mr. McCallum (Markham)	211
Mrs. Wayne	211
Mr. McCallum (Markham)	211

Statistics Canada

Mr. Peric	211
Ms. Robillard	211

Firearms Registry

Mr. Breitzkreuz	211
Mr. Saada	212
Mr. Breitzkreuz	212
Ms. Guarnieri	212

Oil Industry

Mr. Crête	212
Ms. Robillard	212

Agriculture

Mr. Caccia	212
Mr. Speller	212

Guaranteed Income Supplement

Mr. Gagnon (Champlain)	212
Ms. Frulla	212

Presence in Gallery	
The Speaker	213
Business of the House	
Mr. Hearn	213
Mr. Saada	213
Points of Order	
Oral Question Period	
Mr. Casey	213

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Resumption of Debate on Address in Reply	
Mr. Merrifield	214
Mr. Duncan	214
Mr. Comartin	214
Ms. Robillard	214
Ms. Minna	216
Mr. Loubier	217
Mr. Laframboise	219
Mr. Perron	219
Ms. Guay	219
Mr. Laframboise	221
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	221
Mrs. Yelich	222
Mr. Hearn	223

Mr. Comartin	224
Mr. Lunney	225
Mr. Charbonneau	225
Mr. Hubbard	228
Mr. Harvey	229
Mr. Jobin	229
Ms. Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore)	230
Mr. Comartin	231
Mr. Kilgour	232
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	232
Mr. Karygiannis	232

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Older Adult Justice Act	
Ms. Marleau	233
Bill C-439, Second reading	233
Mr. Breitzkreuz	235
Mr. Breitzkreuz	236
Mr. Gagnon (Champlain)	237
Mr. Nystrom	238
Mrs. Barnes (London West)	239
Message from the Senate	
The Deputy Speaker	241

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

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