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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 12, 2004

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 12, 2004

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)

[*Translation*]

PATENT ACT

Hon. Jacques Saada (for the Minister of Industry) moved to introduce Bill C-9, an act to amend the Patent Act and the Food and Drugs Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the special order made previously, I would like to inform the House that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-56 was at the time of prorogation of the previous session .

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

[*English*]

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-56 was at the time of prorogation of the second session of the 37th Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Accordingly, pursuant to order made Tuesday, February 10, the bill is deemed read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

•(1005)

CONTRAVENTIONS ACT

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved to introduce Bill C-10, an act to amend the Contraventions Act and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the special order made previously, I would like to inform the House that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-38 was at the time of prorogation of the previous session.

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

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-38 was at the time of prorogation of the second session of the 37th Parliament.

[*English*]

Accordingly, pursuant to order made Tuesday, February 10, the bill is deemed referred to a committee before second reading and deemed reported from the committee.

(Bill referred to a committee and reported)

The Speaker: The bill will therefore stand on the Order Paper at report stage before second reading, and the notice period, pursuant to Standing Order 76.1(1), starts now.

* * *

WESTBANK FIRST NATION SELF-GOVERNMENT ACT

Hon. Andy Mitchell (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-11, an act to give effect to the Westbank First Nation Self-Government Agreement.

He said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to special order made earlier, I wish to inform you that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-57 at the time of prorogation of the previous session.

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

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-57 was at the time of prorogation of the second session of the 37th Parliament. Accordingly, pursuant to order made Tuesday, February 10, the bill is deemed read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Northern Development and Natural Resources.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-12, an act to amend the Criminal Code (protection of children and other vulnerable persons) and the Canada Evidence Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to special order made earlier, I wish to inform you that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-20 at the time of prorogation of the previous session.

Routine Proceedings

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

[Translation]

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-20 was at the time of prorogation of the second session of the 37th Parliament.

[English]

Accordingly, pursuant to order made Tuesday, February 10, the bill is deemed read the second time, considered by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and reported.

(Bill read the second time, considered in committee and reported)

The Speaker: The bill will therefore stand on the Order Paper at report stage, and the notice period, pursuant to Standing Order 76(1), starts now.

* * *

[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-13, an act to amend the Criminal Code (capital markets fraud and evidence-gathering).

He said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to special order made earlier, I wish to inform you that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-46 was at the time of prorogation of the previous session.

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

•(1010)

[English]

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-46 was at the time of prorogation of the 2nd session of the 37th Parliament.

[Translation]

Accordingly, pursuant to order made Tuesday, February 10, the bill is deemed adopted at all stages and passed by the House.

(Bill read the second time, considered in committee, reported, concurred in, read the third time and passed)

* * *

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-14, an act to amend the Criminal Code and other Acts.

He said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to special order made earlier, I wish to inform you that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-32 at the time of prorogation of the previous session.

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

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-32 was at the time of prorogation of the 2nd session, 37th Parliament.

[Translation]

Accordingly, pursuant to order made Tuesday, February 10, the bill is deemed adopted at all stages and passed by the House.

(Bill read the second time, considered in committee, reported, concurred in, read the third time and passed)

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRANSFER OF OFFENDERS ACT

Hon. Jacques Saada (For the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-15, an act to implement treaties and administrative arrangements on the international transfer of persons found guilty of criminal offences.

He said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to special order made earlier, I wish to inform you that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-33 at the time of prorogation of the previous session.

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

[Translation]

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-33 was at the time of prorogation of the second session of the 37th Parliament.

[English]

Accordingly, pursuant to order made Tuesday, February 10, the bill is deemed read the second time, considered by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and reported.

(Bill read the second time, considered in committee and reported)

The Speaker: The bill will therefore stand on the Order Paper at report stage after second reading, and the notice period, pursuant to Standing Order 76(1), starts now.

* * *

[Translation]

SEX OFFENDER INFORMATION REGISTRATION ACT

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-16, an act respecting the registration of information relating to sex offenders, to amend the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

He said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to special order made earlier, I wish to inform you that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-23 was at the time of prorogation of the previous session.

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

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-23 was at the time of prorogation of the second session of the 37th Parliament.

[*English*]

Accordingly, pursuant to order made Tuesday, February 10, the bill is deemed adopted at all stages and passed by the House.

(Bill read the second time, considered in committee, reported, concurred in, read the third time and passed)

* * *

[*Translation*]

AMENDMENTS AND CORRECTIONS ACT, 2003

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-17, an act to amend certain acts.

He said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the special order made previously, I would like to inform the House that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-41 was at the time of prorogation of the previous session.

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

The Speaker: The Chair is satisfied that this bill is in the same form as Bill C-41 was at the time of prorogation of the second session of the 37th Parliament.

[*English*]

Accordingly, pursuant to order made Tuesday, February 10, the bill is deemed adopted at all stages and passed by the House.

(Bill read the second time, considered in committee, reported, concurred in, read the third time and passed)

* * *

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS ACT

Hon. Jacques Saada (for the Minister of Finance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-18, an act respecting equalization and authorizing the Minister of Finance to make certain payments related to health.

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

* * *

●(1015)

ELIMINATION OF RACIAL PROFILING ACT

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-476, an act to eliminate racial profiling.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House today to present my bill. I thank my hon. colleague, the member for Windsor—St. Clair, for seconding the motion. I also thank the member for Burnaby—Douglas and the member for Acadie—Bathurst who are here today for the presentation of the bill.

The federal NDP believes that this bill to eliminate racial profiling takes an important step toward reaffirming the right of all Canadians to equal treatment under the law. We need a legally binding

Routine Proceedings

mechanism to ensure the accountability of our enforcement agencies and officials to all people of Canada regardless of their race or religious beliefs.

Racial profiling has been a reality in Canada since before September 11, 2001. However, since 9/11 and the enactment of anti-terrorist legislation, we have seen an increase in racial profiling and the criminalization of diversity. Too frequently, innocent people report being detained, harassed or singled out by enforcement officials based on nothing more than the colour of their skin or their religious beliefs.

This bill would be a step toward preventing racial profiling.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-477, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (change of title to Unemployment Insurance Act).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas for seconding this motion.

The purpose of the bill is to change the title of Employment Insurance Act to Unemployment Insurance Act. It needs to be given the fair and respectable title it had when it was created in 1940. It needs to go back to its original title. It was an unemployment insurance for people who lost their job. This bill will give this insurance its true title and the respect that comes with it.

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

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-478, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (qualification and entitlement to benefits).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill concerns the eligibility rules. In this bill, I move that the eligibility rules as set out in this legislation be changed to 350 hours or 20 weeks of insurable employment where at least 15 hours were worked each week.

This is the aim of my bill, because it is unacceptable, given the \$43.8 billion surplus in the employment insurance fund, that only 33% of women and 44% of men qualify for employment insurance benefits.

This could correct this flaw in the legislation, which has meant that people are unable to qualify for employment insurance benefits.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-479, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (percentage of insurable earnings payable as benefit).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill concerns the weekly benefit rate. The aim of this third bill is to increase the benefit payable to 66% of the average weekly insurable earnings, during the highest-paid 10 weeks in the preceding 52 weeks.

This would correct the problem affecting southeastern New Brunswick where investigations are currently being conducted. The whole problem related to time accumulation is affecting not only southeastern New Brunswick, but every region across Canada.

Basing benefits on the highest-paid 10 weeks would encourage people to work, instead of punishing them.

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

* * *

• (1020)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-480, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (length of benefit period).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill seeks to amend the benefit period so that it is one week for each week of insurable employment of 15 hours, up to 52 weeks.

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

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-481, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (benefit period increase for regional employment rate).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to amend the term “remuneration” to exclude amounts received as a pension, retirement pension or allowance, vacation pay or separation allowance.

This will mean, for example, that if people receive a separation allowance they will have an opportunity to find other jobs, set up a small business on their own, or something of the sort. They are penalized under the act as it now stands.

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

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-482, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (benefit period increase in the case of permanent layoffs of workers over 45 years of age).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill deals with people who are 45 years of age or over, to whom I referred earlier. It has to do with financial penalties.

This bill seeks to ensure that employment insurance claimants do not have to pay interest or a penalty in case of the late repayment of benefits, or of a penalty imposed for a violation under the act.

This bill concerns the criteria for eligibility for employment insurance after permanent layoff. The purpose of this bill is to establish the necessary conditions for access to benefits after a layoff at 350 insurable hours, or 20 insurable weeks of not less than 15 hours each.

If a contributor aged 45 years or more is permanently laid off, and has been in the labour force for at least 10 years, the benefit period is increased by 2 weeks for every year in the work force, up to a maximum of 13 years.

The aim of this bill is to help those 45 years of age or more to find employment, because this is the age group that experiences the most difficulty in returning to the work force after losing a job.

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

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-483, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (amounts not included in the earnings).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to amend the term “remuneration” to exclude amounts received as a pension, retirement pension or allowance, vacation pay or separation allowance.

This will mean, for example, that if people receive a separation allowance they will have an opportunity to find other jobs, set up a small business on their own, or something of the sort. They are penalized under the act as it now stands.

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

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-484, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (no interest payable on repayments of benefits or repayments of penalties).

He said: Mr. Speaker, we are asking that no interest be payable on penalties.

In 2002, the government created a new act whereby, as of July 2002, people who incur penalties must pay interests on these penalties. We are asking for the removal of such interests. Indeed, how can people who lose their jobs and who do not have money pay interests on debts of \$10,000 or \$15,000? Therefore, we are asking that these interests be removed.

The Address

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

* * *

•(1025)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP) moved to introduce Bill C-485, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (establishment of Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the ninth and last bill deals with the establishment of a trust fund. Its purpose is to replace the employment insurance account with a trust account. The trust fund would be credited with the contributions paid.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a last comment. The bills that you listed were not in the same order as those I had prepared and I am sorry for this. I could talk to the clerk to ensure that everything is in compliance with the comments that I made in the House of Commons.

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

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS**SPACE PRESERVATION TREATY**

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions this morning.

My first petition is from residents of British Columbia, including from my constituency of Burnaby—Douglas. The petition concerns the issue of the proposed space preservation treaty.

The petitioners are concerned about the termination of the ABM treaty in 2002. They also raise concerns about the use of nuclear tipped NMD missiles in this national missile defence system. They point out that a space preservation treaty would establish a permanent ban on space based weapons.

They therefore call upon Parliament to urge the government to immediately approve, sign and ratify the space preservation treaty and to immediately convene a treaty signing conference for the space preservation treaty.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition, which has also been signed by residents of my constituency of Burnaby—Douglas, is on the subject of equal rights for gay and lesbian couples to marry.

The petitioners note that same sex couples form loving and committed relationships that are presently denied the equal ability to celebrate those relationships through marriage in a number of Canadian jurisdictions. They point out that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees equality to all Canadians.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to enact legislation that would provide same sex couples with the equal right to marry.

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 Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[Translation]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from February 11 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Québec.

I am pleased to speak today to the throne speech, to try to explain to Quebeckers and Canadians and the people of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel how the Liberal government could have taken such a great opportunity and produced such an empty throne speech.

First, I will refer to the text of the throne speech. Then, I will talk about what was not in the throne speech. I want to use this document for three aspects that I, and doubtless all Quebeckers and Canadians, consider important, starting with health.

The last line of the sixth paragraph on page 6 of the Speech from the Throne reads:

These waiting times must be reduced.

I think that the public realizes along with me that this is a matter of will. This should be a goal that must be reached. The federal government has a great deal of money. This morning, another \$7 billion surplus was announced. It is extremely important to understand that the government has decided to invest part, \$2 billion, in the provinces. Everyone knows it, and I will just read the document, because it was repeated in the throne speech. There is still a \$5 billion surplus, which is quite a lot. Out of \$7 billion, \$5 billion remains uncommitted. No doubt, the government wants to try to keep this for its own election campaign and the next budget, except that this is not really in the interests of Quebeckers and Canadians.

With regard to waiting times, the February 2 throne speech states, on the following page, first paragraph:

The Prime Minister announced on Friday that the Government of Canada has determined that, without going into deficit, it will now be able to provide a further \$2 billion health-care transfer to the provinces and territories this year.

The Address

Obviously, it had been announced. For those who do not remember, on January 30, the provincial premiers met with the Prime Minister of Canada. He announced that he would transfer the \$2 billion already promised to them. The same \$2 billion that Jean Chrétien had promised is now being promised all over again by the new Prime Minister. Surely he remembers. There are some things the new Prime Minister does not remember, but he does remember that Jean Chrétien, when he was prime minister, had promised \$2 billion to the provinces. Obviously, this \$2 billion is back in the picture; he announced it on January 30 and confirmed it in the throne speech. It is being recommended.

What is important is that he is in a position to provide this amount this year. Seeing this, several provincial premiers asked the government, "What? This \$2 billion is not something you are going to transfer to us every year?" The answer is no; we can read it in the Speech from the Throne. It is only for this year.

How will it be possible for the provincial premiers, for hospital administrators, to reinvest in personnel if they finally get the money, but only for one year? What do they do? Do they hire employees, lay them off, give them a salary increase for just one year? That is the harsh reality for those who manage the CLSCs, hospitals, clinics and all these institutions. We cannot guarantee that the health care system will be more effective with an extra \$2 billion for all of Canada. That makes \$400 million for Quebec, which is a fine sum of money, but it is just for one year. We cannot plan for the long term.

Once again, in the Speech from the Throne, the federal government is saying it is just for one year. This was criticized by the premiers, but the Prime Minister never objected to it. He even said he would have to look at the country's financial situation annually to determine whether he could renew the \$2 billion. I know perfectly well why he wants to do that. He wants to be able to make an announcement like Prime Minister Chrétien did. He announced the \$2 billion two years ago, and announced it again when he finally authorized it. Then the new Prime Minister got in the act. Every year they will try to make a new announcement.

In the meantime, the provinces, the hospitals, the CLSCs are not sure they will get this money, making it impossible to plan for the long term. That is the harsh reality of the throne speech.

Now I wish to address the part of the throne speech regarding the mad cow crisis. The government promised, or tried to tell the farmers that it would help them.

• (1030)

The Speech from the Throne does not mention any actual dollar figure. Earlier we saw that there was \$2 billion for health, but there is no new money for farmers. There is only one sentence, on page 18, in the second paragraph:

The Government is dedicated to Canada's farm economy ... and to ensure that farmers are not left to bear alone the consequences of circumstances beyond their control.

It claims farmers will no longer be left to carry the burden alone. This is an admission that up until the Speech from the Throne, the Liberal Party left the farmers to fend for themselves. Now, they are being told they will no longer be left to their own devices, but they are not told how much money they will be given. How must these farmers, who are going through difficult times, feel?

Farmers from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, from my riding, and also from the ridings of my other colleagues from Quebec, are going through tough times. We are having problems. We are in a very precarious financial situation and not just in the cattle industry. In Quebec, the cull industry is also affected. It is very difficult for rural Quebec.

In the throne speech, we were entitled to expect some sizeable assistance with this problem, but all that it says is:

...and to ensure that farmers are not left to bear alone the consequences of circumstances beyond their control.

The government does not want to leave them to bear this alone, but of course no mention is made of any money to help them out. It will again say that it will try to convince the Americans or other countries to buy our product, but in the meantime cattle cost money to feed. This is what is happening. The farmers have less and less revenue, and it will not be long until we see a lot of operations going under. Once again, there is nothing in the speech outside of these vague statements of good intentions.

The third point concerns help for the municipalities. We are told that the government will waste no time in trying to help them. The eighth paragraph, on page 11 of the Speech from the Throne, reads as follows:

Therefore, the Government will work with provinces to share with municipalities a portion of gas tax revenues...

It says "will work with", but there are no guarantees that it will.

The next paragraph reads:

This will take time and the agreement of other governments.

That is right, and that is what the Bloc Québécois has been denouncing from the start. You cannot negotiate directly with the municipalities because they are the creatures of the provinces.

As the former head of the Union des municipalités, I know this to be true. It may not suit all municipal officials, but this country does have a constitution, after all. Not that I agree with it, but it does place the municipalities under provincial jurisdiction. The government has been making promises.

In recent months, the new prime minister has been doing the rounds of the cities, telling them he is going to give them money. Yet he knows very well that this is not under his jurisdiction. In the throne speech, he tells us he might, perhaps, share the fuel tax, but that will take agreements with other levels of government. This means there will be no money forthcoming.

The only thing the federal level can do concerns the famous goods and services tax. On this, of course, the speech says:

But the Government of Canada is prepared now... to act in its own jurisdiction by providing all municipalities with full relief from the portion of the Goods and Services Tax they now pay.

The Address

What he says in the throne speech, and of course the Bloc Québécois is pleased about this measure, is that the full GST credit will be given back to the cities, compared to only 57% until now. Over the next decade, this change will provide Canadian municipalities with new stable funding of about \$7 billion.

The government figures that the rebate on the GST will be a form of funding for cities. This is partly true. The larger the city, the greater its expenses and the more money it will get. In the case of smaller municipalities and medium size cities, this involvement will be minimal. Still, \$7 billion will be reinvested.

However, there is nothing in the throne speech on the gas tax and nothing either on the permanent infrastructure program that municipalities and small, medium and large cities in Quebec have been asking for. Once again, we will have to wait for the next budget.

I will conclude by pointing out what is not in this speech. Of course, there is nothing in the throne speech to help the unemployed or to improve the employment insurance program. The Bloc Québécois had asked that this program be improved for seasonal workers. It asked that the two week waiting period, which the unemployed see as a penalty when they must apply for benefits, be abolished. But there is no mention of eliminating this two week waiting period and there is nothing to improve the EI program.

•(1035)

Once again, as regards transportation issues—I am the Bloc Québécois critic on transportation—there is absolutely nothing on the building of new highways. There is nothing on highway 50 in the Outaouais and Basses Laurentides region, in my riding. There is absolutely nothing to get the airline industry back on its feet. This means that there is nothing to help Mirabel airport where, again, 500 jobs were lost because ADM decided to pay tens of millions of taxpayer dollars to Air Transat to move its operations to Dorval.

Again, Quebeckers should be very suspicious of this throne speech which, as far as I am concerned, is an empty shell when it comes to their best interests.

[English]

Mr. Ovid Jackson (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague from the Bloc. I do not agree with everything he said. However, in terms of the farmers, as the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound I am quite concerned about the farming community, the towns, the tractor suppliers and the banking people. Obviously, the farmers are stressed.

The Government of Canada has spent \$.5 billion and I know it has another \$120 million for the cull calf operation.

The thing that frustrates me is why the packers and other people in the community take most of the money that should be going to the farmers? When we had the floods, people were selling firewood and generators at obscene rates. The whole Canadian community put pressure on those people and forced them to drop the price and loan the generators.

I do not know why the packers can take so much money when it is needed by poor farmers. Sometimes government, even with all the

mechanisms it has, does not deliver the money to the people who need it the most.

Does the hon. member have suggestions on the ways and means to get the money to the poorest farmers, the ones who need it the most?

•(1040)

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. The fact remains that it is the Liberal government, his government, that has the means to use the Competition Act to ensure that the money goes to the right people and to fine those who take advantage of the situation.

It is a choice the government made. However, that is not what was written in the Speech from the Throne. I will read to my colleague—in the English version, it is on page 18—what the government decided in the throne speech for farmers. Earlier, I gave you the figure for the municipalities, which is \$7 billion. For health and the provinces the figure is \$2 billion.

Yet, there is absolutely nothing in the Speech from the Throne in terms of an aid package for farmers. All it says is, and I quote:

The Government is dedicated... to [ensuring] that farmers are not left to bear alone the consequences of circumstances beyond their control.

If the government is saying it will no longer leave the farmers to fend for themselves, then it is admitting that it has ignored them. In other words, up until the throne speech, on February 2, the government ignored the farmers.

Now, how can we find a solution? In my opinion, even if we were to use the Competition Act right now, it would be too late. An aid package is needed to get these farmers out of trouble.

As we speak, they have animals to feed. That is reality. When animals cannot be sold, it costs money, because they do have to be fed. Of course, it is not enough to use the Competition Act alone and try to prosecute. I am not saying that we should not do so, though.

Yes, let us fight the processors and those who take advantage of the system to exploit farmers. I have no problem with that. But while we wait, farmers need our help; they are grappling with very serious problems, like feeding their animals. That takes money. And when there is no more money, that is when the situation gets very tough for a business.

[English]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member, would he agree that a cash injection would indeed be the solution? How would he ensure that it got to the farm gate instead of in the hands of the wrong people?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, you know that, in times of crisis, we must trust in individuals, in the men and women who manage their businesses.

The Address

These people often join together in associations. I know that one association in Quebec is the Union des producteurs agricoles. I have complete confidence in this group, which is capable of directly negotiating the amount to be paid and the way in which the government should transfer this money to farmers.

I assume that, in each province, there are producers' associations that could take charge. Some associations are thought to resemble unions, but in fact are private companies. They are not unions of the sort that we find in other kinds of businesses. These are my contributions and, obviously, I believe that we could—with each representative farmers' association—very quickly negotiate direct transfers to ensure that the money goes straight to the producers, who need it so much to feed their animals.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this throne speech debate today. I want to point out a few contradictions in the Speech from the Throne. It states that the federal government wants to stop encroaching on the provinces and start respecting jurisdictions. So, there seems to be a great deal more compassion in this throne speech compared to previous ones.

I want to read the first paragraph containing the key principles of the throne speech.

We want a Canada with strong social foundations, where people are treated with dignity, where they are given a hand when needed, where no one is left behind.

These words are completely meaningless. The throne speech provides no evidence that the government has any intention of giving the provinces the employment insurance fund surplus; there was even an attempt to reduce access to benefits. This is not in the throne speech. With regard to parental leave, if the government had wanted to, it would have complied with the Quebec Court of Appeal's recent ruling and given the money, and it would have stated its intentions regarding parental leave.

The same is true for the CHST. There was no mention that CHST payments should be returned to expected funding levels. Money was invested in health, but everyone is well aware that this is not enough. The \$2 billion invested in health through the CHST was a shortfall.

The same is true for the fiscal imbalance. The government did not want to address this issue, and it is common knowledge that, if the federal government has more money in its coffers, it is because its power to levy taxes has increased over the years.

Nor have we seen any commitment from the government to the artists in areas over which it has jurisdiction. It could, for instance, have decided, in connection with artists, to allow forward averaging of income so as to enable them to pass less tax. As we are well aware, artists have good years and lean years. Most of them are self-employed. There is nothing to cover this in the Employment Insurance Act. It could have provided some degree of flexibility as to the arrangements provinces might make. We see no clear intentions from the government in this area.

We can also see the contrast between Canadian values and Quebec values. We are aware that the value of the Quebec people has been again denied in the throne speech. I will read what it says on the first page.

We have our Canadian values and we can bring them into the international sphere in a humanitarian and effective way.

What distinguishes Canada receives a lot of attention, but what distinguishes Quebec is ignored. The aboriginal culture is recognized, as we in Quebec recognize it, but we would also like to see Quebec, with its internationally renowned artists, recognized for its differences. Those differences are denied in the throne speech, where Quebec does not exist except perhaps as a manifestation of Canadian regional diversity. We got lost in this great value of multiculturalism and diversity under one flag.

I would, however, like to draw attention to certain things in Quebec that differentiate us from what is done in the rest of Canada. For instance, the TV viewing statistics. Francophone Quebecers are very faithful to their programs and their TV personalities; 90% of the programs they watch originate in Quebec. This differs totally from the situation outside Quebec. Canadians in the rest of the country are less likely to watch local productions and more likely to watch foreign programs. The figures speak for themselves here.

● (1045)

The audience share for Canadian programs on English-language television in Canada, not counting Quebec, is 26%, while foreign programs capture 74%. That is a well-known fact. I sit on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

We are well aware that 74% of the programs watched by Canadians, outside Quebec, are foreign programs. They are almost entirely American programs. To a lesser extent, we watch them, too. Still, 62% of the programming watched in Quebec consists of programs produced in Quebec. As for foreign programming, to Quebecers that does not mean just American programs, but programs coming from Europe or broadcast on specialty channels. We can see there is a difference in behaviour.

It is the same thing for commitment to the Kyoto protocol. This is yet another difference. In contrast to other regions, Quebec, because of its environmental practices, has been in the forefront of the struggle to get the federal government to ratify the Kyoto accord.

As early as 1992, Quebec had ratified by decree the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. That is why Quebec hopes that the federal government will ratify Kyoto as soon as possible and guarantee that the Kyoto protocol will be implemented equitably and with due respect for the jurisdictions of each province.

The Address

In the Speech from the Throne, however, we find an encroachment upon Quebec's jurisdiction with respect to water and air quality. Moreover, the government indicates no intention to attack the problem of climate change at its source: oil and coal. We can see that there is no will to enshrine the principle of polluter-pays in the implementation of the Kyoto protocol. We know that it would have been frustrating for certain Canadian provinces.

Similarly, with respect to the Young Offenders Act, Quebec stands out. We all remember the epic battle in the House regarding changes in the federal legislation, then called the Youth Criminal Justice Act. The repressive approach in this bill was soundly criticized by everyone in Quebec who works in that area.

The Quebec approach to young offenders was far more focussed on rehabilitation. Bringing young teens, barely 14 years of age, before an adult court, contrary to the system that had been put in place, runs contrary to any desire to help them reintegrate into society later on, once they have of course served some kind of sentence.

We know our way of doing things in Quebec has had good results. The youth crime rate is the lowest in Canada, and the number of diversions before the youth courts is twice as low as the Canadian average. Once again, the government paid no heed to the difference in Quebec.

The same thing goes for parental leave. In Quebec parental leave was far more flexible, taking into account the realities of families, fathers and mothers in Quebec, who needed to be able to take parental leave through the social assistance system.

What we are seeing is a terrible thing. The throne speech has denied Quebec's cultural difference. I might add that it has also denied some of the commitments the government ought to have made with respect to culture. It is not that we want the government to look after culture, but there are certain laws that need to govern certain areas of culture in Quebec.

There is nothing about whether the government intends to make a decision about lifting the foreign ownership restrictions and barriers. This is an important issue for the entire cultural industry in Quebec and Canada, but especially Quebec. People mobilized and appeared before the committee to talk about this legislation. Where is the government's commitment to culture?

The same thing is true too with regard to copyright. There is no consistency. Quebec's Union des artistes reacted to the Speech from the Throne. It is wondering and asking where the government's commitment to improving the living and working conditions of artists is.

There is nothing on employment insurance and nothing on income averaging for artists. This is what Quebec's artists are asking for. They are calling upon the government to make a firm commitment to restoring the promised funding to the Canadian Television Fund and continue to support production in all cultural sectors. They continue to ask that the government not authorize the lifting of restrictions on foreign ownership, as I mentioned earlier.

● (1050)

In her report, concerning areas of provincial jurisdiction where the government should have taken action, the Auditor General even commented on how its maintenance of historic sites and handling of publications and archival records. This sector is in danger; the situation is catastrophic. This is a federal responsibility. What did the government do? It did nothing. It did not invest the necessary funds to restore historic sites and parks. The archives are also in a pitiful state. The collective memory of the people of Quebec and Canada may lose archives forever.

I think the government continued to take money to the detriment of the provinces and did not make good choices. The jury is out with regard to its results in its own areas of jurisdiction.

● (1055)

[English]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne. I would like to advise you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge.

I am very supportive of this Speech from the Throne. It gives great direction to Canadians, great direction from the government. Why are we now in a position where we can make these substantial new investments and take these new directions? It is because of the hard work of Canadians over the past 10 years. We have put ourselves in a situation where we have control of our finances. The government can govern, can look forward, and can create partnerships with communities because we have the resources, and we have the confidence that we will have the resources in the future.

We have been reducing our debt to the extent that the first \$3 billion in new funding was from reduced payments abroad on debt servicing charges. With continued fiscal prudence—and I am confident we will have that under this government—we will be able to improve that even further.

We are talking about a new era of achievement and we are talking about communities. I am pleased that we have stopped using the word “cities” because too often we were hearing about the agenda of cities. My colleagues on this side of the House have made sure to remind the Prime Minister and his ministers that we must talk about communities. We need strong communities in this country and strong communities will give us a strong country.

Rural areas are not asking for charity. They want proper investment and proper support. We want to release the potential that we have everywhere in this country. I know my friends across the way often speak of western alienation. Down home we do also. It is West Nova alienation. In my riding, which is a three hour drive away from an urban centre, we often feel that we are under-represented in the bureaucracy and in the affairs of government. We want to ensure that we are full partners.

The Address

In Nova Scotia rural areas contribute 70% of the wealth of the province, including the resource sectors and other sectors that are in the rural areas. So it is right that we have those proper investments and those proper supports to release further potential from those areas, as in all rural areas and small communities across the country.

West Nova, which I am very pleased and honoured to have the opportunity to represent, is a microcosm of this nation. We have people from many cultures. We have native people, English people, French people, les Acadiens. We have people who have immigrated from all over the world and their descendants live in that riding. Our industries are wide and varied, from agriculture, forestry, fishing, the military, high technology, tourism, educational institutions, manufacturing and others. All of these face challenges and all of these have opportunities. I look forward to continue working with members of Parliament and with members of the government to help improve the situation.

Agriculture has received a lot of attention lately. It might be difficult for people from other parts of the country to realize the importance that agriculture has in Nova Scotia, but it is important. It is important in my riding and it maintains a lot of small communities and family businesses. It keeps them in place; however, they face significant challenges such as BSE, pork prices, and I will mention a few others later.

[*Translation*]

West Nova is the site of the first European settlement in North America. Next year, we will celebrate the 400th anniversary of the founding of Port-Royal. We invite all Canadians, the Speaker of the House and all hon. members to travel to West Nova this summer to attend the Congrès mondial acadien, which will be a happy reunion. The celebrations surrounding the 400th anniversary will go on all summer.

Some specific activities will take place on set dates. I will be pleased to indicate those dates of interest to hon. members. They should come to my riding to sample good food, meet with people, exchange views and, above all, spend their money.

The people of West Nova are entrepreneurs.

[*English*]

Entrepreneurs are self-reliant. They like to take matters into their own hands and meet their challenges.

There are areas like Cornwallis, which is a fantastic story, a community that was almost wholly dependent upon the military training base. That base was closed because of budget restrictions and program review. We lost that facility. The community created an economic development agency and worked with the assistance of the federal government of the day to give it new life. Currently there are more jobs at that base than there were when the military was there. The jobs are in manufacturing, high technology and education.

There is the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, which unfortunately is having some challenges now which it should not be, and that is why we talk sometimes about the alienation of rural areas. There are bureaucrats who would like to see that centre moved to Ottawa. The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre is in western Nova Scotia because of the hard work of my predecessor, Harry Verran, in working with the

community to make sure that all the potential was released from that area. People from all over the world get excellent training in a very relaxed and good atmosphere and then return to work all over the world. I want to thank the current Minister of National Defence, as well as his predecessor, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs for their support for the Pearson centre, in terms of funding and their continued work to ensure its presence in West Nova.

Yarmouth a few short years ago, about 10 years ago, lost the two major employers. We lost a cotton mill that had been there for over 100 years. We lost a tin mine that had been generating 40% of the tax revenue in the municipality where I used to be the administrator. The community created an agency, locally based and working as in Cornwallis with the municipalities, with the provincial and federal governments and with the local entrepreneurs. The old cotton mill has become an industrial mall and there now are more jobs than there were at the time, or just about as many. There has been a rebirth in Yarmouth.

Those are two great examples for all Canadians of releasing the potential of rural Nova Scotia. Those two communities could have been abandoned, saying that it was the natural course of action, but they refused to do that and now they are keeping young people in those communities and encouraging people to move in. There is lots more work to do in those communities and all others in my riding. The communities will meet those challenges, given the support of the federal and provincial governments.

There was a small grain operation which bought feed and grain in the Annapolis Valley and that moved away. Local farmers created a cooperative approximately five years ago with a little bit of assistance from the federal and provincial governments. They now are financially stable, helping to create a market for those small operations, providing feed for the ranchers or farmers who need it. It is a very good example of a community working with the proper assistance.

I keep repeating that. It is very important that we have agencies like Western Economic Diversification, FedNor, CED in Quebec, and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. It is important that they be on the ground, that they be present, that they understand what the potential is in those communities.

We have further work to do with those organizations. We can use as a base the "Rising Tides" document prepared by the Atlantic caucus of the Liberal Party to improve those agencies, give them a little more flexibility and give them the proper resources. Great work has been done but there is much more potential.

The regional development agencies in those rural communities, such as Western Valley Development Authority and the South West Shore Development Authority, have done fantastic work in accessing and bringing together all the resources necessary to maximize the potential.

The Address

While they are rural areas, these people as I mentioned are very entrepreneurial. They make sure that they take advantage of all the technologies that are out there. There are companies like King's Produce and den Haan's Greenhouses. There is AF Theriault & Son, a boat shop started by a woman and family operated, one of the 10 largest in the country, using new materials such as carbon fibre and preparing those.

They have challenges. For those small and medium size operations to submit tenders to the federal government is very difficult because of the rules in our tendering process and the bonding requirements, so I think we can work further.

BioVision is a new company that started in the Annapolis Valley. It wants to take wood byproducts with cellulose and create ethanol and all the derivatives that can be used by others in manufacturing everywhere where petroleum products are used now.

● (1100)

They need some assistance. The rules need to recognize that they exist. It is very difficult for those who are not in Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa or Halifax to have access to government officials.

I am halfway through what I wanted to cover and I realize that I am running out of time. I want to congratulate the government for the Speech from the Throne, for the directions it is putting forward, for the assistance to communities and highways in my province. It is very important that we have the proper highway infrastructure. It is important that the port of Digby be returned to the community and that we maintain the airport.

I look forward to working very closely with all members of Parliament and ministers to ensure that the resources are brought there. This framing document from which we will get the budget and from which we will get the process is a great initiative and gives great direction to all Canadian communities.

● (1105)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how can we tell there is an election coming? Holy smoke, that could have been a maiden speech rather than one in the dying days of a Parliament. I did appreciate the overview of West Nova by the hon. member who represents that riding.

I want to return to the framework document that he referred to, which is what we are discussing, and that is throne speech. He referred at the beginning of his remarks to this being a new era. I would suggest it is the same old era of Liberal broken promises.

I want to draw his attention to one part of the throne speech on page 4 which states:

We must re-engage citizens in Canada's political life. And this has to begin in the place where it should mean the most—in Parliament—by making Parliament work better.

Later on in the same chapter the throne speech states:

Significantly enhancing the role of all MPs will make Parliament what it was intended to be—a place where Canadians can see and hear their views debated and their interests heard.

So often with throne speeches there are great words and great prose, but the proof is in the pudding, as they say, or actions speak

louder than words. Let us see what the so-called new government has done.

Six days into this new session of the same tired, old government, we see the new Prime Minister, although he is certainly not new to this place, enact closure to shut down debate in this the people's House. This is completely contrary to what the government's stated objective is in this latest throne speech. Even his predecessor, the so-called benevolent dictator, took five months to bring in closure. The new Prime Minister took six days.

I wonder how the member would square the commitment in what he has referred to as this framework document with the actions of his government.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, this is a new government and you are hearing that from a member who has a lot of fond memories of the old government. There is a new Prime Minister and a new ministry.

The question the member has put forward follows very well what the Prime Minister has been saying. Bills are being brought back to where they can be debated in a public forum on their content, not on the form but on the substance, on whether they are good initiatives. I believe they are very good initiatives that have been brought forward in the House, where we can represent the interests of Canadians in debating those bills.

We went through six days of eternal debate on the process as to whether or not those bills should be there. That is not what Canadians have sent us here to do, to debate rules, process and procedure. They want us to debate substantive issues that affect their daily lives. Those bills have now been reintroduced in the House and from that stage, we decide as parliamentarians whether they are good initiatives for Canadians or whether they should be improved.

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the hon. member who, of course, is particularly familiar with issues around fisheries and oceans.

I would like to voice a concern on behalf of many people in British Columbia about the suggestion in the Speech from the Throne that there may be a possible lifting of the moratorium on exploration for oil and gas off the coast of British Columbia. Of course it includes the eastern coast as well, but I am particularly concerned in this instance on the oil and gas moratorium being lifted off the coast of British Columbia. Gordon Campbell, the Liberal premier, has said that he is very hopeful that this moratorium will be lifted as a result of presumably the Speech from the Throne and conversations with the Prime Minister's officials.

Will the member indicate whether it is the intention of the Liberal government to take any steps at all to lift that moratorium? We would be totally opposed to that. Many British Columbians would be opposed to that. Certainly the Haida people in the area who are most affected are opposed to this. It would have a devastating environmental impact.

Will the member make it very clear that the Liberal government has absolutely no intention of lifting that oil and gas moratorium?

The Address

●(1110)

Hon. Robert Thibault: Of course, Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak for the government. That question could be put forward in question period to the relevant minister.

I can say that as a parliamentarian I think it is a question that is worth discussing. It is very important that it be discussed in British Columbia. If the province of British Columbia has shown an interest in having the question looked at, should the moratorium be lifted, I think we should hear from the people of British Columbia. It is a question which some people would say we should not consider, do not talk about it, we cannot even look at it and we should not do anything that would question the moratorium. If the people of British Columbia want to review it, then the government is right to review it.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak to the throne speech, the basic outline the government put forward last week.

On my new capacity as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I have quite a task ahead of me in terms of my responsibilities, not only in working with the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, but also in dealing with the ever increasing number of Canadians who find themselves in difficulties around the world.

Many speeches have been made on this side in terms of the great work that has been done in a number of areas which I will touch on very briefly. I was particularly pleased to hear of the situation that relates to assisting communities in a very real, tangible financial way as well as the beginning of the process of enhancing the starter grant for low income families, the learning bond, as well as a real solid commitment to the country's first nations peoples.

I was interested in the government's approach with respect to the situation as it unfolds in Africa, particularly as it relates to the pandemic there. I have discussed with many colleagues over the years my concerns with respect to Canada's drug patent policies. This is one area where we can clearly demonstrate that notwithstanding the difficulties we see on either side of this great debate, the one thing Canadians have in common is the concern about what is unfolding in that part of the world, which dare I say we cannot afford under any circumstance to ignore.

The position taken by the Prime Minister to uphold the changes to international aid to ensure that cheap drugs are accessed to confront serious pandemics is very much in keeping with the Canadian way. There are concerns that will have to be met. Let there be no doubt that the situation is serious in that part of the world. It is serious elsewhere.

People certainly in my community of Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge do not need a reminder about the devastation that SARS brought upon our communities. We know that Canada is very much a part of the global village. The ease of transportation, the ease with which people can travel around the world, makes the problems of other parts of the world very much our own problems here in this country.

It is for that reason I would hope that the legislation which will ensue from the throne speech, the bill to provide cheaper generic drugs or anti-retroviral drugs, will contain no loopholes which might

for instance allow a brand name manufacturer to have a first right of refusal where a generic might be able to substitute.

We already know that Brazil, India and other countries have a comparative advantage in terms of access to this problem. We also know that Canada, through its NGOs, through its work with Médecins sans frontières, an initiative which I led in my own caucus some two years ago pursuant to the good work of people like Stephen Lewis and others, was taken very seriously by the government. I want to make sure that we understand that this is not something where there is much margin for error. We have to respond and we have to respond effectively.

I spent a considerable amount of time over the past few months dealing not only with the normal domestic issues, but also dealing with issues where Canadians find themselves in some difficulty. The work with William Sampson was only a beginning. We have since seen that there is a very troubling situation developing with Canadians who find themselves in harm's way.

I want to point out that our consular affairs officials within foreign affairs are doing an excellent job. They have an extremely good track record in helping Canadians get out of difficult situations. This is a perspective which I think is not widely shared and certainly is not well discussed often in the cut and thrust of question period. I can say with some certainty, having been involved on both sides of the equation, one as a critic of what was going on as well as seeing what was going on, there is far more that does not meet the public eye, but for which there are some good stories out there.

I plan to do my best to ensure that where we have difficulties, they are properly expressed. I will work with colleagues from all corners of the House to ensure that these issues are resolved. No Canadian should face undue hardship that is inconsistent with the country's own behaviour of treatment, particularly if the country is a signatory to various conventions, whether they be conventions on torture or conventions on treatment of prisoners. As well, we must ensure that due process in other countries is respected.

●(1115)

We cannot be all things to all people. We cannot tell another country how to conduct its business. However we can ensure that Canada's role in connection with other nations on humanitarian grounds is well respected. Many other countries in the world have taken the same position as Canada with respect to the protection of human rights.

I look forward to working with other colleagues on this to bring amplitude to the concern that has been raised as it relates to the situation Canadians find themselves in all too often.

I should point that the number of Canadians who find themselves incarcerated around the world has tripled since 1990. We have a number of people who are travelling and who do find themselves from time to time in harm's way. It is for that reason that we must work that much harder to ensure that Canadians get the message that the way we do things in Canada is not necessarily the way the rest of the world does it. To use an adage that is trite, and as trendy as it may be, when in Rome do as the Romans do.

The Address

I am pleased with respect to the initiatives taken by the Prime Minister, the cabinet and the caucus. I hear hon. members making remarks about democratic deficits and suggesting that it somehow does not work. I want to let all those individuals and critics know, and of course we understand the rules in having to say these things, but what we see in terms of the need to restore and enhance the role of members of Parliament did not happen by accident. The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton, who is also the parliamentary secretary responsible with special emphasis on democratic reform initiatives, myself and others, as members will know in previous parliaments, tended to be on the outside of the conventions.

We have had an enormous amount of consideration given to be able to impact significant areas of public policy. It is not lost on the vast majority of people who know the reputations of many of the members of Parliament here who now find themselves in the position of some authority and trust with their positions having been enhanced. This enhancement is not shallow, nor is it window dressing. It is real and very much a tribute to the Prime Minister for ensuring that the role of members of Parliament is enhanced.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I ran for Speaker of the House in 2000. In many respects, although it was the early days, the issue of democratic reform was certainly right. The concern that Canadians had and, of course, the low turnout in the last election, prompted many members of Parliament to become involved in the process of trying to, as it were, wrestle the balance between the executive and legislative authorities.

I think we have come closer to finding a balance that is acceptable and modernizes the instruments by which we govern ourselves. Therefore, we are, accordingly, to our constituents to whom we owe our utmost responsibilities, able to discharge our functions effectively and appropriately with some confidence.

I must say that the process has not been easy but it is one that I believe Canadians in general support. They can see that the modernization by which we govern ourselves is very much at the heart of what has made our parliamentary system both unique and accessible to all Canadians.

It is in that context that I am pleased to see that so much more in the throne speech has been suggested as far as accountability is concerned. Canadians can therefore believe in their governments and believe that this Parliament and this House of Commons can achieve things.

I have said it before. I have been successful for a number of years with the help of so many colleagues in the House of Commons in passing meaningful legislation. I want to make sure that is not the exception but the rule. The circumstances enhancing the ability for every member of Parliament to have a bill brought before it, debated in the House and sent on to the other place to become law is an effective representation of what Canadians expect.

When Canadians go to the ballots and see the names of the candidates and then elect a candidate, they want to know that the individual can purposefully bring forth concerns and introduce legislation that will have an impact, which has, for many reasons and for a variety of other pitfalls in the system, been ignored in the past.

I think everyone in the House would agree that those kinds of amendments are necessary for the survival of the evolution of this great House. I would point out that Bill C-249, a bill which was passed some 10 months ago, has yet to receive royal assent. It seems to be caught in the other place. Of course, we hope there is also a spirit of reform that involves both Houses.

• (1120)

I look forward to the day when all members of Parliament can go back to their constituencies after a particular election and say that we have made a difference, that we are not nobodies, 50 feet away from the House of Commons, but that collectively, regardless of our differences of opinion and regardless of partisanship, we can still do the job for the Canadian public.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure that I do not exceed my 10 minutes. I will be pleased to answer the questions of hon. members opposite.

I am also taking this opportunity to say that, even though an election will soon be called, there is still work to do. We must immediately begin vigorous debates on the bills introduced by the government, this for the benefit of all Canadians.

[*English*]

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear the member for Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge spend some time on the freedom that members of Parliament should have in not only representing their constituencies, but in bringing forth legislation that might even change the course of government.

However I want to pose a question to the member to see if indeed that is where he is going.

On the government side right now, the member for Sarnia—Lambton; the previous speaker, the member for Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge; and also the member for Malpeque, the former solicitor general, all have views on the gun control issue. In fact, they have built their reputations on telling everyone where they stand on the registry.

The previous speaker, the member for Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge, wants to scrap it. The member for Sarnia—Lambton wants to starve it so that it collapses. The former solicitor general from Malpeque wants to decriminalize it.

I would have to suggest that here is a chance for them to fulfill a good portion of the Speech from the Throne where they will not only re-engage citizens in Canada's political life, but they will also include significantly more free votes so that members can represent the views of their constituents as they see fit.

Is the member going to pursue and push these points on the agenda significantly and make it happen on that side?

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member for Calgary Northeast has a very sincere and interesting perspective on a number of issues. We have attended many conferences together, particularly with the police community, on issues that are extremely important to the safety of Canadians.

The Address

I want to point out and be very clear on the record that I have never proposed the scrapping of the gun bill. In fact, I supported it and I continue to support it. Like any other member in the House, I am concerned about its cost.

However, as the hon. member knows, whether I am dealing with people from the Toronto police force or the Durham police force, which is part of my riding, I have on a number of occasions been befuddled by this debate about the necessity of having some kind of understanding of what is behind the doors as the police respond to domestic disputes.

The hon. member knows, and was privy to the same information I was, that Bill C-68 has been effective in restricting the amount of ammunition that is available to gangs. Gang violence is certainly on an upswing, particularly with small arms.

I have absolute confidence in the minister responsible, the member for Mississauga East, who is doing a splendid job consulting with stakeholders who have hitherto not been involved in discussions in the past. She is doing exemplary work to get to the bottom of the concern to the point where I believe the hon. member ultimately will be able to support it.

As far as the democratic deficit and democratic concerns, I have always been free to vote my mind. As the hon. member knows, I have probably voted more times, and dare I say this, with some respect, against my own government than most members of the House of Commons. I have no trepidation with doing that now. The Prime Minister has signalled the wisdom of that approach, which is that we also have to represent our conscience and our constituents. This Prime Minister recognizes that and I am prepared to campaign on it.

• (1125)

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my friend on his appointment. I know he has spoken out on a number of occasions about human rights, particularly about the human rights of Canadians overseas.

I want to ask him a very specific and brief question about a shocking episode that happened here in Canada: the search by a large number of RCMP officers of the home of journalist Juliet O'Neil. I think many Canadians were appalled at what happened in those circumstances. That flowed directly from Bill C-36, the government's so-called anti-terrorism legislation that was passed in the weeks after September 11. That member voted for that legislation.

Does he not recognize that the potential for very grave abuses of human rights, which we as New Democrats identified at that time by voting against the bill, has become a reality? Would he not agree that we should go back to the drawing board, scrap that legislation and come up with legislation that more carefully reflects the respect for human rights—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. While the clock has run out I will allow a little time for a response. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, we need to balance the question of security in a modern age with individuals who are concerned, as the hon. member and all of us in the House of Commons are concerned, about civil rights.

The legislation under which Ms. O'Neil's belongings and other things were intruded upon not only deals Bill C-36 but previous legislation as well. We need to look at the legislation because it is clearly inconsistent with Canadian values. I want to look at it. I believe the House of Commons will do just that.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Prince George—Peace River and as the official opposition senior national defence critic to respond to the government's Speech from the Throne, though perhaps respond is not the appropriate word in this case.

If one is a beef producer, struggling on the verge of bankruptcy as many are; a sawmill worker watching his or her industry waste away; or a proudly serving member of the Canadian Forces, there is not much to respond to in this Liberal pre-election document. These Canadians must be wondering if their federal government has forgotten their very existence.

I know the residents in my riding are feeling increasingly alienated from Ottawa. Throughout the past year, while the government was on hold waiting to crown its new leader, the current Prime Minister, the country has been in the midst of two devastating crises in the beef and softwood lumber industries. Also, throughout the past year, impartial military experts, both here in Canada and abroad, have intensified their decade long pleas to the federal government to rescue our armed forces from the brink of collapse.

There was little evidence that these crises even existed in the speech delivered by the Governor General last week. Perhaps the Prime Minister ran out of room. After all, he had to leave space in the speech to insert the word "new" no less than 31 times.

This was all part of his attempt to distance himself from his predecessor, Jean Chrétien, and to convince Canadians to forget that, as a former finance minister, he was one of the most powerful individuals at the cabinet table through most of the past decade. He was an active participant in the policies, legislation and decisions implemented by the federal government. He was even the one signing the cheques.

It was somewhat surprising that the Prime Minister, in the few words that he afforded the Canadian Forces, had the audacity to boast that he would be replacing the 40 year old antique Sea King helicopters. It was his government that cancelled the original contract to replace the maritime helicopters a decade ago. It was his government that prevented a new contract from be awarded when political considerations repeatedly stalled the procurement process.

It took 10 years just to get the request for proposals to supply new helicopters issued. The contract has still not been awarded. Complete delivery of the fleet of 28 choppers is not expected to be phased-in until 2010, five years later than the Liberals predicted. I am more than a little puzzled as to why the Prime Minister would want to draw this failure to the attention of Canadians in his throne speech.

The Address

The only other military commitment contained in the speech is also not new. The purchase of 66 Stryker vehicles is a recycled Jean Chrétien announcement. There is nothing new there, yet the new Prime Minister has claimed it as his own. The Strykers have been a controversial purchase from the very beginning as the wheeled vehicles are questionable at best as a replacement for our aging Leopard tanks.

However, I want to focus on what really matters in the debate surrounding military helicopters, tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery, planes, ships or any other piece of military equipment. I feel the government and some Canadians sometimes overlook one critical part of the equation, the human element.

These machines and technology that we are discussing are the tools which are supposed to safeguard the lives of the men and women that we as a nation send into dangerous situations to serve, protect and keep the peace. These are men and women with mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, sons and daughters. These are people who accept the risks and sacrifices of their vocation and are still willing to get the job done on our behalf.

These are people like Private Nathan Smith, Private Richard Green, Corporal Ainsworth Dyer and Sergeant Marc Léger, who died when a U.S. bomb was mistakenly dropped on their location during a training exercise in Afghanistan in April 2002.

• (1130)

These are people like Sergeant Robert Short, a father of two children and Corporal Robbie Beerenfenger, a father of three, who made the ultimate sacrifice last October when their Iltis vehicle drove over a landmine; and Corporal Jamie Murphy, who died just last month in an attack by a suicide bomber.

When we are debating military equipment, we are ultimately defending the military personnel whose lives depend upon that equipment. I strongly suspect that the Liberal government has failed to connect that equipment with the people it asks to serve in unstable, wartorn conditions, far from home and loved ones.

Before he became Prime Minister, the member for LaSalle—Énard unequivocally promised to ensure that Canadian soldiers were equipped with the best possible equipment. That is what he said when he was aspiring to be Prime Minister. Now that he has the job, he is frantically backpedalling on this promise. Were he truly serious about getting our troops the tools and the backup they need to do their jobs, he would not be using a wide-ranging defence and security review as an excuse to further delay new military purchases or to boost troop levels.

These so-called reviews and studies are what the government uses to avoid making decisions or taking a stand on critical issues. Increasingly, the government solution to evading difficult questions from the opposition benches and reporters is to initiate a review, an inquiry, or an audit, and then refuse to answer any potentially embarrassing questions. It is what government members use to help them balance as they sit on the fence.

What will the Prime Minister do about the actions of CSIS in the Maher Arar case and the RCMP raids on the home and office of an *Ottawa Citizen* journalist? We will not know until the report from a public inquiry is issued after the election.

What will the Prime Minister do about the issue of same sex marriages? We will not know until the Supreme Court responds to the additional legal question he just recently submitted to the court, a response that he knows cannot be possibly be completed until after the next election.

What is the Prime Minister's explanation for the \$4 million discrepancy in federal funds that Canada Steamship Lines received when he was its owner? We will not know until the Auditor General responds to his request to check it out. And again, that will not be known until after the next election.

We are all well aware of the present scandal that has engulfed not only Parliament, not only this so-called new government, but indeed the entire nation where hundreds of millions of dollars were thrown away in Quebec on this sponsorship ad scandal. There will be another inquiry. It seems like there has been an inquiry a week ever since this Prime Minister took over.

Also included in the Auditor General's report was the question about the \$100 million that the Liberal government decided upon within nine days of talking about it. After nine days Liberals spent \$100 million on two luxury jets to transport the cabinet instead of allocating that money where it was needed which is to our armed forces.

What will the Prime Minister do to rebuild the Canadian Forces after his government slashed \$20 billion in real cumulative dollars since 1993? We will not know until his defence and security review wraps up this fall, after the expected spring election.

Voters are being sent to the polls by the government without being told its position on critical federal legislation and policies, nor its explanation for questionable operations and funding allocations. The Liberals are betting on the fact that they will not have to answer for their actions until after they become comfortably situated in government for yet another term. This is a serious underestimation of the Canadian electorate.

Our troops have waited long enough for the government to figure out what it is doing. In fact, many say that it is already too late. Regular force personnel strength has fallen by about 30% over the past decade. Senior commanders have told the Prime Minister that they will not have any more personnel to spare. The 2,000 soldiers sent to Afghanistan and the ongoing commitment in Bosnia has left our army exhausted and depleted. Rotations home have been deferred and training delayed.

• (1135)

I want to make it clear that the men and women who serve in the Canadian Forces are not reluctant to do their jobs. On the contrary, in speaking to them, I have learned that our soldiers are more than eager for opportunities to put their skills and training to work in service of their country. That is what they signed up to do.

Yet, it is not an easy job and I would argue it is not made any easier by the government. Enforcing peace and security around the world in wartorn countries is physically and mentally demanding work. Our troops require time between missions to rebuild their strength and to constantly develop their skills through more training.

The Address

Canadian troops have been deployed on over 70 missions in the past 10 years, more than in the previous four decades combined. This burden is being carried out by fewer and fewer personnel, equipped with helicopters and medium transport aircraft that are 40 years old, 35-year-old logistical supply ships, 33-year-old destroyers, grounded Hercules transport aircraft and rusted out dune buggies for patrolling the desert badlands.

It came as somewhat of a surprise to our soldiers last week when they watched their new Prime Minister announce on national television that 500 troops would remain in Afghanistan after the current mission ends there in August of this year.

If he was serious about this commitment, the Prime Minister has failed to recognize the dire shortage of personnel and resources. If it was simply a flippant commitment made for the benefit of television, then the Prime Minister was being irresponsible and insensitive to our dedicated and overworked soldiers.

When the head of Canada's army retired after 39 years of service last May, he told us of his worries about the future. Lieutenant-General Mike Jeffrey said at that time:

I cannot help but have a growing sense of concern over the challenges that this nation faces and the army's ability—indeed, the Canadian Forces' ability—to meet them. The world has changed, and I'm not sure we're keeping pace. We are participating, there is no question of that. But are we really playing our part? Do we want to make a difference, or do we just want to ensure our flag is present? In the final analysis, our military is too small to allow Canada to play the kind of role it should on the world stage. The soldiers are paying the bills with their service, with their health and sometimes with their lives. Our military is as stressed as it has ever been and I fear that it will not be able to continue at this pace for much longer.

The man who replaced Lieutenant-General Jeffrey obviously had to be a bit more diplomatic at the time, but even he could not help point out how the government has let down the men and women of the forces. On the day he took over as new army chief, Lieutenant-General Rick Hillier stated:

Our soldiers do magnificent work; they do it without complaint and they give Canada great service. I'd like Canada to support them just a little bit better.

For 10 years the government has failed to produce a defence policy paper. In that time, the official opposition has completed two such documents. We compiled these comprehensive positions on national defence by listening to military officials, past and present, and experts on international security affairs around the world. The unanimous conclusion, no matter whom one asks, is that the Canadian Forces simply do not have enough personnel both in the regular force and in the reserves.

Last December Queen's University and the Conference of Defence Associations released the findings of its study entitled "Canada Without Armed Forces". It was a thorough and impartial report. It was also very blunt about the state of the Canadian Forces. It stated:

Two essential components are specifically in danger today: there are simply not enough trained people, or the facilities and resources to train them, to ensure that the Canadian Forces will be operationally fit in the future. Second, major equipment is failing from age and use, and the plans to replace it are inadequate to the demand.

• (1140)

The study went further and concluded that:

The crisis caused by wilful disarmament is upon the nation and threatens the country's hard-won and honourable place in the international community of like-minded nations. Canada's sovereignty...is increasingly unsure.

The Queen's University study concluded that the Canadian Forces regular personnel strength should be increased to 85,000. This reflects what the official opposition concluded in our own defence policy paper. We also advocated that the reserve force be increased to 60,000.

As for the men and women who currently serve, I am continually amazed at their dedication and motivation despite the lack of support they receive from this government, to whom morale appears to have little meaning.

Funding to put more troops in the field cannot be spared, but an internal study by the Department of National Defence itself found that its headquarters here in Ottawa was bloated with about 1,000 more bureaucrats than needed. That is half the number of soldiers currently serving in Kabul, Afghanistan. It is estimated that by cutting those 1,000 bureaucrats, NDHQ would save as much as \$70 million, money that could and should be used for operations.

Aside from denying our troops the equipment they need to do their jobs, and additional personnel, the government consistently fails to give the men and women of the armed forces the respect they deserve. I will give the House two recent examples of this neglect.

When soldiers serving in Afghanistan asked to learn the results of medical and environmental air quality tests in Kabul last year, their request was refused. Senior officials in Ottawa dismissed their worries that the fecal-contaminated air could cause short term and long term health problems. Instead of taking their concerns seriously, senior brass suggested that sharing this vital health information with soldiers could launch another gulf war syndrome.

I would like to commend military ombudsman André Marin and the military's medical staff for overcoming the resistance of military commanders by insisting that troops in Afghanistan be privy to test results that had a direct bearing on their personal health.

It is in both the soldiers' and the military's best interests to investigate and share such medical information so that if medical problems arise in the future, factors such as air quality can be either included or excluded as the cause. Regardless, it should never have been an issue. Soldiers should have been immediately provided this information in order to reassure themselves and their families and loved ones about their long term health.

Like any other employer, the Canadian military cannot be permitted to deny information about health risks to its employees. Then again, this is not the only situation where the government has used its special status to disregard the health and safety of our soldiers and their families.

What happens when the government is both the employer and the landlord? We just need to ask the many men and women and families living in military housing units throughout the country. Let me say that not many members of the House would be willing to live in many of the private married quarters on Canadian Forces bases across the country.

The Address

Imagine paying rent for a house or an apartment that is so poorly insulated that a family's food freezes in the cupboards in the winter. Imagine the risk to children's health from black mould growing on the walls. Imagine the water smelling of sewage, which people must boil before drinking.

The Canadian Forces Housing Authority oversees military housing units on the government's behalf. With any other landlord, a renter would be protected from appalling living conditions under provincial landlord-tenant legislation, but the Government of Canada does not have to comply with such provincial housing laws. Instead, not only have personnel living on base had to endure these conditions, but they are now being hit with a \$100 monthly rent increase each year.

The life of a soldier is no nine to five job. Most are on call 24 hours a day. Proximity to their base is critical. They must uproot their families every few years to wherever they are asked to serve. They are deployed for months at a time, leaving their spouses and their children behind. Often, the community on a military base is the only source of emotional and practical support for these families. The housing that is supposed to facilitate their lives is often a substandard health and safety hazard.

Last fall, I helped initiate a petition campaign demanding that CFHA discontinue these exorbitant rent increases, at least until it had made significant repairs to its military housing units. So far this issue seems to have fallen on deaf ears in the government.

• (1145)

I know my time is short. I have more that I would like to say, but let me conclude by stating that this so-called new Prime Minister appears to be picking up where his predecessor left off when it comes to support of the Canadian Forces. He appears to be just continuing on, making our soldiers, their families and all Canadians pay the price for his government's lack of direction in national defence and foreign policy and its lack of support for the Canadian Forces.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton Centre-East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my hon. colleague from Prince George—Peace River for his speech and for his good work on the defence file.

While our armed forces scrape by for real needs, other money flows generously under the table, seamlessly. There was \$100 million ordered, politically, for Challenger jets, the procurement period for those Challenger jets to be in the order of some 30 days, while we are in something like a 25 to 30 year procurement period for replacement of Sea Kings. We have another \$250 million of advertising ordered politically, and \$100 million went for fees and commissions.

I would ask my colleague if he would agree that the general public is holding this widespread belief of many that the government exhibits a culture of corruption and neglect unprecedented in the past 50 years. I would also ask my hon. colleague if he thinks Canadians have a chance for this to change in the future with a Liberal government continuing.

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would commend my colleague for all the work he has done, not only on defence files and in representing his constituents from Edmonton, but also the work he

has done with our veterans. I believe that in a very real sense veterans have been abused by the Liberal government over these many years. I know that the member has worked diligently and very hard to try to raise the profile of some of the concerns of the veterans and their associations across the land.

Obviously this is a bit of a loaded question. We are heading into an election. As one would expect, things will become increasingly partisan not only in the chamber but out on the hustings across the land. Although this government is trying desperately to distance itself from its predecessor, the Jean Chrétien government, as I said in my speech, actually it is just picking up where the previous government left off.

The current Prime Minister cannot possibly manage to claim ownership of bringing the deficit under control and running surpluses, on the one hand, and yet claim to know absolutely nothing, supposedly, about all the hundreds of millions or billions of dollars that have been wasted under his signature as finance minister. This is absolutely ludicrous.

Either this man has been completely incompetent in his job as finance minister or he has been complicit and he knew what was going on but chose to keep silent about it. There can be no other explanation. It has to be one or the other. In either case, I would suggest that Canadians are going to think very seriously about giving such an individual another term at office, in the highest office, actually running the affairs of our nation.

• (1150)

Hon. Dan McTeague (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not going to allow any of those comments by the member for Prince George—Peace River to stand.

I understand the hon. member's interest in making and scoring partisan points here against the integrity of a man who has the absolute confidence of not only his party but of the vast majority of Canadians in this country, beyond doubt and beyond question. But I can tell the hon. member that when he suggests, as he does here, that somehow this man was responsible for writing the cheques, I am surprised the hon. member is not actually saying that he is responsible for sinking the *Titanic*. But that of course is the mentality of the Conservative Party as it morphs itself into yet another example of why it does not deserve the trust of Canadians.

Let there be no doubt about what the Prime Minister is doing and what this side of the government is doing. We have a serious problem. The Auditor General just a few minutes ago in the public accounts committee suggested that there is no way under the sun even a minister could have known what was going on. The situation was embedded very much in depth inside the departments. That must be bad news for the hon. member, who is looking to score some cheap political points.

I can assure the hon. member of one thing: I will be glad to debate him or any member on that side when it comes to the integrity of the members on this side, particularly the Prime Minister of this country, who has not only earned it but continues to sustain it in the minds of Canadians.

The Address

To the hon. member, very simply, a question to him: When are you going to stop the hyperbole and when are you going to start dealing with the facts? Do you support the initiatives of the independent commission?

The Deputy Speaker: Just on the chance that the tone might possibly become more animated and so on in the days and weeks ahead, we should always be mindful to make all our interventions through the Chair and not directly across the floor.

The hon. member for Prince George—Peace River.

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I did say, and I think this proves my point, that in the days and weeks ahead, as you just said, the House is going to become much more partisan and we are going to have to experience a lot of partisan sniping like that of the hon. member.

He made reference to the fact that pretty soon we will actually blame the Prime Minister for the sinking of the *Titanic*. I would suggest that was a good choice of words, because actually his government, with that Prime Minister as captain, is going to be going down with the *Titanic* before very much longer. He had better use the existing polls all he can, because I think he is going to see quite a dramatic change in the near future once this scandal really takes root with Canadians.

As for his question about supporting an inquiry, of course we support an inquiry, but I pointed out in my speech that it is not just coincidental that the inquiry after inquiry after inquiry that have been announced in the space of a couple of weeks by the so-called new Prime Minister are all going to culminate with the facts being known after the next election. All of those things are going to be election issues, despite the Prime Minister's best efforts to have it otherwise.

Finally, there is the fact he now states that even a minister could not know what was going on. More and more information is seeping out from over there about how this subject of the blatant misuse of tax dollars through this sponsorship program was discussed at the Liberal caucus years ago. Where was the Prime Minister then, when he was finance minister? Was he conveniently in the washroom every time this was discussed? That he pleads ignorance is beyond belief, and if it is true, then he is so ignorant he should not be running the country.

• (1155)

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that the hon. member is privy to our discussions in caucus, but I will ask the hon. member, if he is so convinced that we should have inquiries that should be given the opportunity to answer instantaneously, why then is he not supporting his own caucus members as they do their work on the public accounts committee? What is it about the inquiry that the hon. member is so concerned about that might do exactly the opposite of what the hon. member wants, and that is to use this as a political football in order to try to score a few political points?

The member talks about partisanship. He talks about the rhetoric in the House. I can assure the hon. member of one thing. The Canadian public wants to see some answers as to why this was done. If the hon. member sees that there are people who will ultimately be charged by this, or that ultimately there is an exoneration, a vindication, what will the hon. member then do then? Go back to another issue? It is clear to me that the hon. member cannot have it both ways.

We have done what the Canadian public expects us to do under the circumstances. No member of Parliament in this caucus, or I believe on that side, is responsible for this issue. It is possible that people well beyond the ambit of Parliament have done some awful things, but the question of accountability rests with the member of Parliament. Will the member of Parliament stop the political rhetoric and start dealing with some of the facts?

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, that is just absolutely unbelievable. I will tell the hon. member, for the benefit of the House and those viewing this debate today at home, who is responsible: his government, his ministers. That is who is responsible.

In the 10 years I have been here, I have never seen this government or these ministers take responsibility. Is there such a thing as ministerial accountability? It went out long ago. It has never been part of the Liberal government and I can tell them that Canadians are getting sick and tired of it.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled to be able to rise today and make some comments on the throne speech.

I will begin by talking about aboriginal people in the north and end by talking about a number of other areas, which I was quite happy to see in the throne speech, until my time runs out.

Many exciting developments are happening in the north and aboriginal people are participating as full partners. There is no doubt in my mind that these trends are late. I am convinced that Canada's long term prosperity is linked with the continued growth of the northern economy. To ensure that this growth benefits all Canadians, northerners must continue to be involved.

Allow me to explain this by citing a few recent examples. Canada is now the third largest producer of diamonds, thanks to successful mining operations in the Northwest Territories. This success is made all the more important because of the strong partnership struck between first nations and the mining companies. As a result of these partnerships, the majority of projects, contractors and labourers are from nearby communities.

Similar partnerships have been struck across the north: to plan natural gas pipelines through the Mackenzie Valley and to the Alaska Highway; and to mine gold and diamonds in Nunavut. All these projects have the potential to generate substantial profits for investors and deliver significant benefits for aboriginal peoples in northern communities.

The collaborative approach adopted for these projects is a model for others and will certainly contribute to Canada's long term prosperity.

My belief is based on two concurrent facts. First, the natural resources of the north are vast and relatively untapped. Second, many aboriginal communities are eager to participate as partners in the development of these resources.

The Address

The key to the success of Canada's diamond industry, for example, has been its example to partner with northerners. Diavik and BHP Billiton have adopted a stewardship approach that demonstrates tremendous respect for both the environment and for local communities. Diavik, for instance, signed an agreement with the Tli Cho, formerly known as the Dogrib first nation, before the company owned the Ekati mine. Today the majority of the mine's workforce is made up of northerners and nearly 50% are aboriginal.

The mine buys 70% of the goods and services it needs from suppliers based in the Northwest Territories. Tli Cho Logistics Inc., a company created by the first nation to provide services to Ekati, employs more than 106 band members.

The partnerships with diamond companies have also enabled first nations to realize other community goals. In the past four years, for instance, the number of Tli Cho people enrolled in post-secondary studies has increased sixfold. By playing an active role in the diamond industry, residents of aboriginal and northern communities can acquire the skills they need to develop their own businesses. This increase in business activity will enable communities to gain access to the resources needed to develop their economies. Other aboriginal and northern communities may be inspired to partner in other projects. As a result, the young people in the north can look forward to a more prosperous future.

The mining companies, of course, also benefit from these partnerships by tapping the knowledge of the people most familiar with the fragile environment of the north.

More than 2,000 people work at the two mines. Ekati and Diavik buy approximately \$450 million worth of goods and services each year. Other activities, such as exploration and site preparation, pump millions of additional dollars into the north.

The economic effects of Canada's diamond industry are already being felt across the nation.

Diamonds are also responsible for creating thousands of jobs in the rest of Canada as the equipment manufacturers, food distributors, transportation and communication companies service this booming sector. From Vancouver to Halifax and from Windsor to Iqaluit, a wide range of enterprises now benefit from diamond mining.

Diamonds are only the beginning. To drive maximum value from these vast stores of natural wealth that lie in the ground and under the ocean, we must first tap the human resources in the north. With northerners fully engaged in the economy, Canada's prosperity will be enhanced.

Let us consider for a moment the potential impact of Canada's demographic projections. The aboriginal population in Canada is relatively young. Approximately half of Canada's aboriginal people are under the age of 25. The birth rate among aboriginal people is twice that of the general population.

● (1200)

With this growth comes opportunity: expanding markets for goods and services, fresh supplies of workers and entrepreneurs. Indeed, recent statistics indicate that aboriginal youth are much more likely than other young Canadians to start businesses. Today aboriginal

people own more than 30,000 companies, and that number increases every day.

The key is to ensure that all projects are sustainable and that northerners benefit from them.

The Government of Canada has an important role to play in ensuring that the vast economic potential of the north is realized in a sustainable and inclusive way.

By negotiating land claim agreements, for instance, we help ensure that first nations and Inuit communities can access resources and develop their economies, and we create greater certainty for investment. Significant progress has been made on this front recently. In fact, most northern land claims have either been settled or are nearly complete.

In Yukon, eight first nations governments are in place. In the Northwest Territories a unique agreement was signed six months ago with the Tli Cho First Nation that combines a land claim settlement and a self-government agreement. All of these agreements help to create the certainty and clarity needed to attract business partners.

The Government of Canada can also ensure that northern and aboriginal communities plan, direct and participate in new developments.

A few years ago Nunavut acquired territorial status. In fact, we are now approaching the fifth anniversary of this exciting new territory. We are now working with the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporate, a land claim organization, in order to build the foundations that will enable the territorial government to assume greater responsibility.

Last year the responsibilities of land and resource management were transferred to the Yukon government, along with the capacity required to assume them. In the Northwest Territories, discussions on devolution are progressing steadily.

The government also plays an important role in the creation of infrastructure required for economic development, particularly in the north where there are few transportation links. On the Deh Cho bridge project, for example, a consortium of private and public groups has proposed to build the bridge and ensure year round access into Yellowknife.

Much preparatory work is being done before the project can go ahead: financial analyses, engineering studies, environmental assessments. The Government of Canada is proud to support some of the costs of this preparatory work.

Last year the government contributed \$3.6 million toward the construction of 12 smaller bridges in the Mackenzie Valley. Once these bridges are complete the winter route between Norman Wells and Fort Good Hope will be open for up to 16 weeks a year.

The Address

In Yukon, Canada infrastructure funds were committed for the rebuilding of the remainder of the Alaska Highway.

The benefits of these construction projects are numerous. Northerners can look forward to increasing mobility, greater access to social services and a drop in the cost of living. For oil and gas companies, the bridges will make exploration less expensive, increasing the likelihood of new drilling activity.

The government's role is also to provide leadership and lend support to new projects and ideas. By funding preliminary engineering studies and research, for instance, we ensure that new projects can attract other private and public sector investors. Our efforts pave the way for others. Our involvement helps to foster the partnerships that produce positive results.

Any discussion of the future of the north is incomplete without describing projects that are expected to have great impact and generate large revenues: the proposed building of a pipeline through the Mackenzie Valley. That pipeline represents not only a huge project to the benefit of the north, but also the potential to open up the north to hydrocarbon exploration for 25 to 50 years. This will bring benefits to northern as well as southern Canada and contribute to the North American energy security.

Clearly, our chief goal must be to ensure that oil and gas resources are developed in an environmentally sound and socially sustainable manner. We must ensure that northerners are directly involved in every step of the way.

The Government of Canada is proud to have recently committed just under \$11 million over five years to the Aboriginal Pipeline Group's plan to acquire up to one-third ownership of the project. With this money the group is attracting other investors.

• (1205)

Of course, much work remains to be done before any pipeline project can proceed. We must ensure that the appropriate regulatory regimes are in place, for instance, to minimize any potential harmful social and environment impacts.

We must acquire the scientific knowledge that will form a range of policies to plan, implement and monitor the project. We must also ensure that each of the communities that would be affected by the project has the capacity to realize the benefits.

We must ensure that pipeline projects adopt the same approach followed by other recent initiatives in the north. This approach is characterized by respect for local communities, for the environment and for the bottom line.

This approach features businesses and northern communities establishing honest, mutually beneficial relationships. Clearly, this approach will stimulate new levels of economic activity in the north and produce tremendous advantages for Canadians.

I also want to talk about the Alaska Highway pipeline, which is several times larger than the Mackenzie Valley but all the same conditions, partnerships, goals, objectives and environmental sensitivity apply. This would bring huge volumes of gas from the Arctic slope down through the Yukon and into British Columbia. It would provide huge increases in GDP, many opportunities for

putting gas into or taking out of the pipeline in Canada, and a lot of benefits for northerners and a number of aboriginal groups along the highway route.

This morning I attended a session on frozen methane. Some statistics indicate that there is more frozen methane available than all other natural gas and hydrocarbon resources in the world put together. There is great potential for northern research and we are definitely increasing our emphasis on northern research. The best project in the world on frozen methane is occurring right in Canada's north.

Not long ago I met with the Mining Association of Canada which has unique proposals related to the extension of flowthrough shares, the expansion of the exploration tax credit and the fine-tuning of exploration costs. I certainly hope the Department of Finance looks at these seriously, given the emphasis on resource development in the throne speech, as it would be an excellent stimulus for exploration in the north of our resources, which is so important to our economy.

I will also be proposing for my riding a venture capital fund, which was proposed by the Federation of Labour. This fund would provide more venture capital for those people starting up businesses.

I was quite excited, as many people were, with the initiative in the throne speech that would allow patent drugs to get to places like Africa where there is an AIDS crisis. My constituents are also concerned about this and think this is good legislation. I have received an e-mail from Stephanie Starks which summarizes people's concerns and support for this. Ms. Starks is on the social justice committee of the Whitehorse United Church. I have had a number of constituents visit me on this issue. They are concerned that the legislation has provisions permitting the patent holders to block licences for generic manufacturers. They do not want that to occur. They are concerned that there is a limited list of pharmaceutical products; that there is a denial of benefit to some developing countries that are not WTO members; and that there is no provision for NGOs to procure generic medicine.

I hope as we go along with that bill we will look into those concerns to make sure the bill is as effective as possible in helping those who really need it.

I was also delighted to notice in the throne speech that \$3.5 billion will be allocated to help clean up federal contaminated sites. Not only is this money beneficial to the health of Canadians, but it will also create significant employment on the work involved in cleaning up these sites. It will help us to research modern technologies to do this, to use those technologies in Canada and to export them around the world.

I was also personally very excited to see in the throne speech the emphasis on health promotion. I think it applies to more than health. It is my philosophy, being in government, that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The Address

•(1210)

We must work on preventing tragedies. We must work with people on their lifestyle and diet choices to prevent them from being in the health care system. This would save a lot of costs, both human and financial, down the road. I was also very excited to see the effort to reduce waiting times as a priority in the throne speech. A number of my constituents have approached me on that.

I was delighted with a number of initiatives relating to aboriginal people, which I will not have time to talk about but other members will cover them. The whole theme starts in childhood right through school age and beyond to train and provide the skills and opportunities to first nations people, aboriginal people. Through education they can develop the skills necessary to take part in today's workforce with a modern human resources strategy.

Because of my particular role in Parliament I was excited to see a reference to the northern strategy. The government has indicated how important that is for the economy of the north. I have touched on a number of areas that we could work on.

I was also very pleased to see a number of references to helping people with disabilities. Certainly in the spirit of liberalism, if we have a strong business sector we can create the revenues necessary for our society to help those most in need. Certainly people with disabilities fall within that. I was delighted to see tax measures that would help people with disabilities and their caregivers. We are going to employ more people with disabilities in the federal government and ensure that there are more education and training opportunities for them.

I was also very happy to see the whole cities agenda. The municipalities that have contacted are very excited about the GST rebate and the fact that the federal government is developing a relationship with cities to help them in the modern context with the struggles they face and the increasing responsibilities which they bear.

I have worked for a number of volunteer organizations. In fact I helped establish a volunteer bureau in the Yukon, so I was delighted to see support for the voluntary sector. It is an integral and essential part of Canadian society as it exists today.

I was delighted to see support for arts and culture. This is important for our identity as a people and our spirit. The cultural industries also provide significant input to the Canadian economy.

I was delighted to see support for women entrepreneurs as a priority. Also, there are a number of initiatives related to making student loans more accessible, especially to students with less resources.

I was also happy to see the reference to foreign credentials. Sometimes places in the north have trouble getting professionals. If obtaining Canadian credentials for people coming from overseas could be expedited, this would help the shortage in that area.

I was delighted with the emphasis on regaining Canada's place in the world in the foreign affairs agenda. Two things are of particular interest. The first was the emphasis on multilateralism. Most people would agree that Canadians by and large are very supportive of that way of dealing with world affairs. Some major scientists in the world

recently had a conference. They suggested that the biggest threat to the world was communicable diseases and that strong multilateral institutions are needed to combat these types of diseases.

We are going to look at international institutions and the mechanisms they use to protect people when their own government is not protecting them. Perhaps we could prevent crises like the serious tragedy that occurred in Rwanda.

•(1215)

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Yukon on his appointment as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

I was very interested in his comments about what kind of development will be taking place in the north. We hear all kinds of discussion about pipelines and the like. I have family who work up in the Inuvik area and it is all to do with oil and gas. Certainly that will be the future of the great north. There will be a significant need for that kind of development to make sure that we can tap those great resources in the north.

My question will not be so much on the north. My question is directed to the parliamentary secretary. I am interested in his comments. The parliamentary secretary used the word "delighted" I do not know how many times, perhaps a couple of dozen times over things that he observed, read or agreed with in the Speech from the Throne. However, he did not mention anything about how delighted he was when it comes to the democratic deficit. It is the issue that seems to be on the minds of so many people when it comes to dealing with parliamentarians and the way we do business here, or the way we do not do business here.

I will refer to the Speech from the Throne in a couple of places. The first place is on page 4 at the top of the page. The Prime Minister made note of this when he gave his comments on the speech:

We must re-engage citizens in Canada's political life. And this has to begin in the place where it should mean the most—in Parliament—by making Parliament work better. That means reconnecting citizens with their Members of Parliament.

I am sure the member is aware of the incident which took place in Switzerland. The Swiss people presented their parliament with a referendum. They declared to their parliament that they wanted to see a real crackdown on pedophiles in their community. In other words, the Swiss wanted to lock them up and throw away the key. That came from the people. Parliament was very reluctant to deal with the matter in that fashion. However, it had to go along with the Swiss people given the fact that it was through a referendum.

I ask the parliamentary secretary, how strong will he fight for the people in this country to make sure that they have the same kind of an opportunity and protection in law for such initiatives as referenda or citizens' initiatives?

•(1220)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his congratulations.

The Address

I am delighted the member has asked the question, because I can talk on a couple of points. I did not mention the democratic deficit in my speech because I actually talked about it at length yesterday. Therefore I did not repeat it.

Regarding the citizens' referendum, what I have done to fight for it in Canada is very interesting. In my previous life I was involved in rewriting the municipal act in the Yukon. We brought exactly that format into the municipal act in the Yukon, one of the places in Canada, and there are a couple of others, with all the controls. It is very complex legislation but it certainly performs quite well in that level of government.

Talking about the democratic deficit here, I can comment on the government's initiatives. I am quite excited at the proposals for addressing the democratic deficit and the results so far.

The three-line vote will allow far more votes by individual members. It is going to change the whole nature of Parliament. Ministers will have to sell their ideas to parliamentarians.

I certainly hope people on our side will not think that if we have a vote and a law is defeated, that it is a defeat for the government. I certainly would not consider it to be that. I would consider that a victory for democracy because if the proposed law was not good then we would defeat it in Parliament. I am very excited about that and I hope that all the opposition parties will vote in a similar spirit.

I do not want to take up all the time on this topic, but the other thing I am most excited about is the sending of most bills to committee before second reading, the ones that are going to be on one and two-line votes. If a bill goes to committee after second reading, the members on the committee really cannot touch the general nature of the bill, the whole intent, the general principles. When a bill is sent to committee before second reading, as was done with the assisted human reproduction bill, members of Parliament will have broad latitude in shaping that bill. Especially important is they are going to be able to select the committee chairs by secret ballot. The scrutiny of appointments is good as well.

I have one last thing to say on the democratic deficit and what has happened since this broad vision was made. I am very excited that the government is proceeding very seriously with this issue. People may not know this, but it was developed with our caucus. It was not just dropped on us. We had many meetings to put in ideas and as members can see, the government is serious.

Our first votes were two-line votes right near the beginning. I will be really excited to see how it works when we get into legislative votes. I will try to be accountable to the member to make sure that what we have promised is working as it should. I hope everyone works in that spirit and I hope this will be a much more interesting House for that reason.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Windsor West.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise in reply to the Speech from the Throne. Whatever good there might have been in the throne speech, it seems to me that it has now all been obliterated by the events of the last few days and what has happened as a result of the Auditor General's report.

The Speech from the Throne is a speech whereby the government hopes, and maybe we hope collectively as a Parliament, to give people a sense of hope about the vision of the government and what we might look forward to. That is what a throne speech should be about. It seems to me that the scandal that has happened in the last few days and over the last number of months is shaking the very bedrock of Canadian democracy. It has clearly pointed at the Liberal government in terms of the horrific events that have taken place with the \$100 million that has been shovelled out to front firms for the Liberal Party.

We are debating the throne speech, but I think we have to put it in the context of what is now taking place. It is particularly ironic given the proposals from the government for addressing the democratic deficit.

The throne speech was disappointing for us as New Democrats. We had hoped for a clear direction and vision that the new Prime Minister would articulate for Canadians in terms of fixing some of the serious problems that we have in this country. When we look at the throne speech and the commitments that were made around medicare, there is not a word about Roy Romanow, about home care or helping Canadians who are aging, facing difficulties, and need to have a national home care plan.

There is not a word about prescription drugs and the fact that medicare's fastest growing expense comes from prescriptions. We have this increasing stranglehold by big pharmaceutical companies that are close to the Liberal government. Instead, we got an already promised \$2 billion one time funding that is doing nothing more than helping to starve the system while privatizing it at the same time. I know that very well coming from British Columbia where Gordon Campbell, the junior partner of these federal Liberals, is carrying out his privatizing plan.

Let us look at the environment, another key concern of Canadians. It is unbelievable. The only connection to the environment in the throne speech was a commitment from the government to recycle its old promises, for example, repeating its 10-year-old promise to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

There was no mention of mandatory GMO labelling. I receive hundreds of e-mails from people about this very simple thing, this basic right to information of what is included in the food that we buy. There is no mention of labelling of GMOs, something that the government could easily have addressed.

There was a lot of hype about a so-called new vision and new deal for Canadian cities and local communities. The reality is that each year the infrastructure deficit in this country grows by \$2 billion. What has the government promised? It is about \$700 million.

The Address

Many municipalities and mayors gave a favourable response, but is that a surprise to any of us? When people have been in the desert for so long waiting for anything to come their way, it seems to me anything they can grab they will be thankful for, but if we look at the real commitments for our cities they absolutely pale in relation to what the problems are. The fact is that over the next 10 years the government will spend \$3 billion less on cities than has been spent on corporate tax cuts in the last three years. That puts into context the commitment that was made.

What about housing? I am the housing spokesperson for the federal New Democrats. Many of us have worked very hard to put affordable housing back on the political agenda. It is really hard to put into words the sense of anger and despair that I have and that I know is shared by millions of Canadians when we watch programs such as we saw last night on CBC that looked at homelessness across the country.

• (1225)

This is a wealthy country. Why is it that we still have destitute people on the streets? Why is it that we still have people who have lived for years in emergency shelters? It is because of decisions that have been made by the government. These are often passed off as individual failings, but they result from a failure of public policy.

I felt a great sense of anger when I heard that \$100 million went to some phony companies and about the scandal we have been dealing with in the last few days. That \$100 million would have built 4,000 new affordable housing units for Canadians who are desperately in need of housing.

To add insult to injury, the minister who was responsible for the so-called national housing framework agreement, Alfonso Gagliano, is the same guy who is now complicit in this whole scandal of shovelling money out to Liberal-friendly firms. What an outrage. Here we see the real sharp contrast of what is taking place in this country. The government is taking care of its corporate friends and its Liberal pals while Canadians are out on the street homeless with no place to go.

Let us look at education for a moment. The throne speech stated:

Investing in people will be Canada's most important economic investment.

I agree with that. It sounds like a good thing. The throne speech went on to say:

The Government's goal is to ensure that a lack of financial resources will not be allowed to deny, to those with the motivation and capacity, the opportunity to learn and aspire to excellence in pursuing a skilled trade, a community college diploma, or university degree.

I agree with that too. However, what solution was offered? We have heard that loan limits will be increased in recognition of the rising costs of education. What an insult to students. The national chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students had it right. He said:

Prime Minister Paul Martin's proposal to increase student loan limits is a blueprint for increasing student debt.

Every time loan limits increase, universities and colleges simply hike fees, plunging students into even deeper debt. This is equivalent to a tuition fee increase.

In Vancouver, British Columbia, thousands of students hit the streets on February 4, as they did across the country, in a national

day of action to protest the government's pathetic response to post-secondary education and its failure to recognize that the real problem in lack of accessibility and rising tuition is the massive retreat of public funding that has been engineered by the federal government over the last decade. That is where the blame lies. Simply raising the loan limit for students is quite an outrageous and insulting thing to do.

• (1230)

What about the greatest deficit that exists in our country, the social deficit? This is something that I am concerned about, and it is something that is a real priority in my riding of Vancouver East.

The president of the Canadian Council on Social Development recently wrote an article pointing out that:

...the latest census figures that came out in 2001 really end the arguments. They point to a society in which income disparity is growing, not falling; to stubbornly stagnant poverty rates; to an entrenching have-not new immigrant class that is faring far worse than previous generations of new Canadians; to continuing Third World living standards among First Nations people; to increasing homelessness; to still significantly lower income levels for women and ethnic minorities.

He raised the question of whether the Prime Minister would tackle the social deficit with as much gusto, energy and commitment as he has tackled the deficit when he was finance minister? In reality, \$100 billion went to corporations but no money went toward the social deficit. Today in British Columbia 125 organizations are rallying to stop the arbitrary time limit on welfare that was caused by the government. These are only some of the issues that should have been addressed in the throne speech.

• (1235)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today and speak about the Speech from the Throne.

I want to put some context into why we are doing this. My colleague noted that we had a situation where the government released a Speech from the Throne thinking that it would be a way of building Canada or a way of moving us forward. We know all sides of the House would expect that we could have a good debate about the ideas and about the things that we would see in the upcoming year. What has happened is that a series of other events have overtaken that and put a cloud over the government.

What I did in terms of preparing for today was to think about the last year in terms of the last Speech from the Throne which was called "The Canada We Want". In it the government set forward a series of action items that it considered a priority at that time such as Kyoto. The government mentioned smart borders in terms of our relationship with the United States and abroad, and a number of other initiatives related to municipalities and funding.

Today the government is the same. We have not had an election. We should be looking at what has happened over the last year to see the advancement of our country, not only in terms of ourselves in our communities but as a nation abroad. It is very disappointing. That is what we need to do when we are reflecting upon this government and its Speech from the Throne that has very vague platitudes about actions that later on translate into decisions at budget time.

The Address

The government's action on Kyoto over the last year has been abysmal. Canadians have seen nothing. There has been nothing for consumers who want to purchase environmentally friendly products and services, nothing in terms of businesses that are repeatedly coming to members of Parliament from all sides saying that they have good ideas and they want to invest in a better and brighter Canada, but do not have the ability to do so.

This is important to note because this Speech from the Throne abandons that.

The throne speech talked a little bit about municipalities in terms of the GST. If we go back a year, the previous Speech from the Throne set aside money for an infrastructure fund. Grand plans were talked about for an infrastructure fund. The government was patting itself on the back about how much it would make a difference for municipalities.

I simply ask Canadians, have they seen any federal money in their ridings, their neighbourhoods, on their streets that have actually improved their infrastructure? It has not happened. Quite literally, when we broke down the numbers, it equated to approximately \$50,000 per municipality in terms of infrastructure funds. It is outrageous. We are talking about a sidewalk that we might be able to install in a community or repair a small part of a road, or fill some potholes. It was \$50,000 per municipality. This is not acceptable.

We now come to this Speech from the Throne and we get the GST for municipalities, that they should not have been paying for in the first place. They already had a partial rebate on the GST. Therefore, it is not a full 7% that the municipalities would get back.

I know municipalities across Ontario and in other parts of the country are going through their budget deliberations right now. That money that they are getting from the GST will not be enough to counterbalance the downloading that has happened from the federal government and other levels of government. It is an insidious way of trying to say that the government is doing something by not taking something from the municipalities and then making them say they should be thankful for that.

It is difficult in terms of accepting this Speech from the Throne's discussion points on the actual sharing of the gas tax. It is quite simple for the government. If it wants to participate in building this country instead of providing money to tax cuts or shelters or having environmental fines be tax deductible, it could use those resources and direct them straight to municipalities as the previous throne speech did.

The federal government does not have to negotiate with provincial and municipal governments because it knows the result. The result will be bogged down endlessly and Canadians will not see improvements on their streets.

• (1240)

That is what people should be thinking about for the next year, going into the next election: infrastructure projects. How many construction signs are up? How many bidding contracts go out for municipalities? How many more waste water treatment plants are upgraded or improved? We should compare that to the platitudes that are espoused in this document.

It is important to note another issue in regard to the Speech from the Throne. Despite the fact that there has been a literal cry for help from municipalities, from business people and from auto workers for a Canadian national auto policy, we have not even seen a single statement on that. This is critical, because we have witnessed over this last year a series of very difficult situations for the auto industry and we still have nothing. Not only that, the government is not even discussing with the United States what it is going to do in terms of challenging the fact that the U.S. governments are actually stealing Canadian jobs by funding plants. Of the last 18 plants that have been created in North America, only one has come to Canada because there has been massive government subsidization on the U.S. side from a trade agreement that our government agreed to, yet does not challenge—and there is a dispute panel available for that at NAFTA—nor does the government say that at least we are going to create a national auto policy. That is dangerous.

The fact of the matter is that we have 98 Liberals in Ontario, with the auto industry one in six, and they could not get a single notation of the auto industry at a critical time in this nation's history. We are seeing some great technological evolution in the automobile. The key for the future of the automobile is going to be what comes out of the tailpipe for our environmental concerns, but more important for our consumers and our citizens at the end of the day is to have jobs producing these new vehicles, and quite frankly that simply is not happening.

We have these new technologies that will be rolled out, and what will happen is that the United States basically will be stealing or providing subsidies to make sure that they get them. That is what happened recently with DaimlerChrysler and its new hybrid engine that is going to Michigan. It got massive subsidies and now it has a brand new plant manufacturing a hybrid engine, which we do not have in our community or here in Canada.

I also want to talk about a specific issue, because it is important that people can at least associate some of the issues of the Speech from the Throne with their own communities. In Windsor, Ontario, we have been struggling to get the government to act on government funds committed by the former prime minister for border infrastructure improvements, with the province of Ontario, funds of \$300 million. More than one year later we have not seen a single penny, despite the fact that the community literally has cried for help.

On top of that, and this is actually a scandal of national proportions, we have a municipality here that is being offered \$300 million, or could be eligible if there were actually a plan for which they could apply, for infrastructure funds, but the plan has been so corrupt and so flawed that they have actually hired an environmental lawyer to the tune of \$1.5 million in a war chest to fight the government's plan.

The Address

In fact, another municipality, the town of LaSalle, has done the same thing. They have hired an environmental lawyer to fight this government. How incredible is that, when we have a lower level of government, a municipality, having to reach out to the taxpayers to fight the senior level of government's implementation of their own dollars? It is absolutely obscene. It is scandalous. It has to change.

We have simple items of consensus. I want to boil this down so people across Canada understand this. One of the roadways we have to cross is called Huron Church Road. There are approximately 10 lanes, with approximately 40,000 vehicles, many of them tens of thousands of trucks, that travel this corridor per day. We have schools, churches, business and homes there. In getting to one of the schools, Assumption College, a very historic one in Canada, people cannot get across the actual streets safely. We have had tragedy after tragedy.

Despite that, we cannot get a pedestrian crosswalk. The absolute cost of this, the total, is \$1.5 million. We cannot get it. The Prime Minister's company can get \$10 million in government grants, but we cannot get \$1.5 million to get students safely to school. Tragically, last month a mother was killed taking her children to school. How many more deaths have to happen before the government actually translates some of these things that are in the throne speech to real things that change Canadians' lives? The government is accountable.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I first of all would like to acknowledge the new member of Parliament from Windsor, Ontario, and wish him well in his journey here in this very special place.

I am very familiar with that road area he is talking about near Assumption College High School in Windsor. I think it would be very important to clarify to the people listening to the debate that the Government of Canada does not have the responsibility to do crosswalks. This is essentially generated from the municipality. If this were a pure responsibility of the Department of Transport and no other jurisdiction were involved, then I think he would have a point and we would be happy to take it up with the Department of Transport. I wish he would clarify that matter, because in all my experience I have never seen a situation where the national government was involved in pedestrian walkways.

● (1245)

Mr. Brian Masse: Hence, Mr. Speaker, this is the way the federal government has been able to escape responsibility.

We should look at Huron Church Road. In our municipality, the 400 series highway, the 401, ends before the bridge crossing by about six kilometres. The government stopped the 401 and hung the municipality out to dry for the rest of the infrastructure. Because that is a connecting link highway, it is the provincial government that the hon. member supports which has jurisdiction on that. It has to be done in conjunction.

Second, the City of Windsor could actually get infrastructure funds if the government would actually fund municipal infrastructure that applied to this and not starve out the city. I want to read a comment here, because people do not care who is responsible; they want the funds to happen. If governments can make other things happen, they can do this:

My children attend Assumption high school. I fear every day that they may not make it across Huron Church Rd. One of their friends has become an orphan this year because a truck ran over their mother. It is irresponsible for the government to continue to ignore a problem they know puts children at risk every day, when they can decide immediate to rectify the situation. No excuse/ reason will justify the continued negligence of the government on this issue!

We cannot expect the taxpayers of the City of Windsor to pay tens of millions of dollars to put in pedestrian crosswalks for an international truck policy. By allowing us to go into NAFTA and not putting any money into infrastructure for cities to deal with this, it is federal trade policy that created the problem. It is not the citizens of Windsor who should have to pay for international truck traffic because of federal trade policy. They should not be hung out to dry anymore.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his intervention on the Speech from the Throne. I would like him to also note that there are a lot of other things that were missed from the speech as well, not only on auto policy, not only on those workers who are unemployed and do not know where they are going because the federal government has not taken action.

In my constituency, the farmers, the ranchers and the young families are coming into my office to say they are about to lose everything. This BSE issue, with the agriculture crisis that has gone on for years now, is about to ruin them. They literally break into tears. When we have a young 30 year old guy in front of us in tears, we can see how critical this really is.

We have to remember that the government did not include that in its throne speech, just as it did not include the auto industry. It did not include anything about those young farmers. I would like the member to reiterate what was missed in that throne speech.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question, because I think it is especially important to denote the age group he identified. Whether people are in the auto industry, the cattle industry or the farming industry, the age of 30 gives us a good example of some of the problems that we currently have with this government. Literally, we have students graduating and people coming out of school with huge debts. At the same time, they are trying to have families and get started in business.

What the Speech from the Throne did not do was provide hope and opportunity for those people who are starting employment later and who are having challenges in industry outside of their capabilities because of government policy. That is one of the important things a Speech from the Throne should drive to: it actually should have hope for all.

Similar to that is the lack of mention of seniors in the Speech from the Throne. There was one mention of seniors, the people who built this country. It is not acceptable.

The Address

•(1250)

Mr. Dennis Mills: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would get me the details on that pedestrian walkway in Windsor, I would give him an undertaking that we would work with Infrastructure Canada and the transport department and do our best to fix it, ASAP.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the offer. I will do that.

Unfortunately, this has been the way his members opposite have been running this in the past.

Maybe the member can help.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to take part in the debate on the throne speech. As we know, the objectives of the Government of Canada are very clear.

We want a Canada, and that includes the regions, 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. We want a country for Canadians. But we also want these vast regions of the country, and the individuals, families and communities that live in them, to have the tools they need to find local solutions to local problems.

We want a strong economy for the 21st century, with well-paying and meaningful work; ready at the forefront of the next big technological revolution; and built on a solid national foundation.

To this end, the Government of Canada is committed to a new deal for Canada's municipalities, always in cooperation with the provinces, and this deal includes our large region of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik.

Our region covers an area of some 802,000 square kilometres and has a population of about 100,000. The distance from the south to the north, is 2,000 kilometres. Ours is a vast Nordic and semi-urban region.

The Speech from the Throne talks about health issues. We already know that some projects are truly based on cooperation. We also know that a pilot project is currently underway in Val d'Or, in the Vallée de l'Or. The purpose of the project is to help address the shortage of doctors, because we know this shortage is a problem in remote areas.

Nonetheless, we know that the institutions, the committees set up in northern hospitals in Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, have found solutions. They are going to put together a multidisciplinary team of health professionals. This team will be responsible for monitoring the health of patients who require special care.

The Val-d'Or project is consistent with Quebec's desire to create an integrated services network, along the lines of hospital mergers, and always in cooperation with the Government of Canada.

Let us come back to our great region. We are talking mainly about regional and rural development. The Government therefore remains committed to supporting economic development through the regional agencies where the focus must be on strengthening the

sinews of an economy for the 21st century, building on indigenous strength.

The government will develop a northern strategy, ensuring that economic development related to energy and mining is brought on stream in partnership with people in the know, in other words by forming associations with the provincial governments.

In November 2003, I wrote to the Minister of Natural Resources, who responded today, telling me that with respect to the Prospector's Association or the Quebec Mineral Exploration Association, its president, Pierre Bérubé, has made several interventions in the past few months to discuss mineral exploration. That is an example of how the government can find solutions in cooperation with people in the know.

However, we should look at the Speech from the Throne, which says we must work in partnership with northern Canadians. Agreements should be entered into by Quebec and Canada, like the ones that existed several years ago, which were made for the long term; these were five-year agreements. Cooperation with the provinces should be sought in order to be able to move forward with specific mining projects.

In northern Ontario, FedNor, the Federal Economic Development Initiative in Northern Ontario, is collaborating very well with the people of the area to find solutions. That is what we want for Quebec. We have CED, Canada Economic Development, but that includes the big urban centres. We know that these large urban centres receive nearly 75% of the money available for regional development. We do not want to be a part of it.

In my riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, the paramount issue is communications. The people are talking about telecommunications and technology. But there is a problem in these vast regions, in the matter of broadband and the Internet. We know that, in smaller communities, the government is spending millions—so it has announced—but we must find a consensus.

We are seeing something else as well. There is the issue of licence renewal for Radio Nord Communications. The unionized employees have been on strike for over a year. Radio Nord has been closed since then. The union is demanding separate newscasts, better separation between radio and television, and adequate staffing covering the whole territory.

We know that the CRTC is responsible. When people come to talk to us in our region, they always say, "It is up to you, the government, to fix this". But, in telecommunications, the CRTC makes the decisions, at arm's length from the government. The only thing we can do is to speak, as I am doing now, to pass the message along.

•(1255)

We know that the CRTC is very aware of what is going on in the House of Commons. It is important that the CRTC demand that the minimum number of minutes produced locally each week be increased. This is what business people in remote regions, and not just the union, want.

The Address

But let us get back to another issue that is really important in our vast region of 802,000 square kilometres. Ours is the largest federal electoral district in the ten provinces of Canada. I represent the only riding located north of the 60th parallel. It includes northern communities called northern villages, where the Inuit are currently living.

We are talking primarily about aboriginal and Inuit people. We know that we want to fully share our country's prosperity, but we also know that, as a whole, aboriginal people, be it the Cree, the Naskapi, the Algonquin or the Inuit, contribute to the economy. Everything that gets to their communities comes from the south, which means that people in the south also contribute to the economy. Some might say that the Inuit do not pay taxes, but that is not true. The Inuit from Nunavik pay taxes like all of us, like all the members of this House. They pay school taxes, federal and provincial income tax, and they contribute to the economy.

There are problems in that vast region of ours. We know that, in the Chapais-Chibougamau area, people really want to be involved in the mining and forestry sectors. The problem that we are currently experiencing with the United States regarding our softwood lumber is slowing down the economy. Currently, we may have fewer layoffs in our region because companies do not want to shut down. They want to put people to work and so on.

Even though our government says in the throne speech that we will be involved in the mining and forestry sectors, a long term solution must be found regarding softwood lumber and agriculture. The United States has been trying to get at us for 50 years through our softwood lumber. They have imposed a tax and anti-dumping duties. Still, in our regions, whether it is Val-d'Or, Senneterre, Lebel-sur-Quévillon, Matagami, Chapais-Chibougamau or James Bay, the forestry sector is really important.

When we take a close look at what is going on with agriculture in a northern region such as Abitibi-Témiscamingue, we realize that there is a national crisis. It happened in western Canada, but the situation back home is really serious. I often ask my government to create programs that do not have a set duration, but rather an indeterminate one. This national crisis could last two or three years. The government is aware of what is going on in other countries.

The throne speech says that the government will work to foster a technologically advanced agricultural sector and find solutions to ensure the survival of farmers. Therefore, I am telling the government that a permanent program is needed, not one with a specific end date; for example, saying that it will end December 31 this year, and then start all over again. As always, action must be taken in collaboration with the provinces.

Currently, in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, the situation with regard to farming and the mad cow crisis is not the same as in southern Quebec. We know what is happening. I was talking with Alain Richard, the President of the UPA, who said that the issues are not the same. The governments of Canada and Quebec have done everything possible to ensure it is the best program. That is what we want. We know this is a national crisis. It is going to last two or three years.

An agreement regarding the James Bay Cree was signed on November 11, 1975. The government should respect the James Bay agreement. The great chief, Dr. Ted Moses, and all the chiefs of Cree communities along James Bay have been making demands for several months now, particularly with regard to housing.

In these communities, housing is critical. Even nowadays, in Cree communities in James Bay and Inuit communities in Nunavik, 15 to 18 people can share a two-bedroom house. Approximately 5 or 6 kids will share one room. The throne speech said that housing solutions must be found, and not just in the major urban centres. We need to think about housing in aboriginal communities, both Inuit and non-Inuit.

● (1300)

You know how it works. Everything comes from the south: wood, windows and all manner of other things. In other words, the aboriginal people and the Inuit are part of this economy along with the people in the south.

As far as Nunavik is concerned, in that huge riding, fishing is an issue. Fishing, shrimp fishing in particular, is a means of survival for the Inuit of Nunavik. We know there are quotas. In the north, there are beluga quotas. The Inuit have a limit of 14 per community, but would like that number to be 20. We know there is overhunting. However, I think the government should increase the quotas for the communities in Nunavik, because if they are too low, people are just going to hunt on the sly. I would rather see them hunt in the open, with improved quotas.

In the throne speech, the Government of Canada stated the intention to seek solutions for all the aboriginal communities in my riding.

Now, to go back to the mining sector, since we are talking about local problems. This is an opportunity to speak about what is going on in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, James Bay and Nunavik. People will say that is far away.

Mining is important there. It takes seven years to get a mine up and running. There is a problem in Matagami at this time, one to which the people are trying to find a solution. They know that one of the mines is about to close. Mines are closing all over Canada. If the ore is exhausted, then a new mine must be found.

The people at the Noranda mine already have a project called *Espérance*, but they are waiting for the price of copper or zinc to go up enough before they start up. The workers in that region are really far—approximately 250 kilometres away—from any big city in the south. A way must be found for Noranda to get this project under way in order to ensure the people of long term employment.

The throne speech contains many wishes, but we know nothing will be fixed right away. A budget is needed. The government, through the Minister of Finance, can put a program in place at any point in the year, as far as mining operations are concerned.

The Address

In conclusion, it is really important to find solutions for remote areas. If we look at the issue of primary resources, in the forest industry, 68% of our primary resource in softwood lumber is processed in major urban centres. It is transported over 500 kilometres to the south. In its Speech from the Throne, the government supports us with respect to secondary and tertiary processing.

It is not easy for a promoter who wants to bring a project to the table. We need to find new ways of handing the financing. The Business Development Bank of Canada can help with loans, and also with the softwood lumber crisis. People are talking. There is \$2 billion in an account at the border. The United States said, in an agreement in principle, that it is prepared to reimburse 52%. If it is prepared to say we will get 52% back, I am all for it. Let them free that money up and return it for Canadian industries to use. As much as \$1 billion could be made available for the industries to use.

In the end, with respect to the softwood lumber crisis, I would still prefer action, a specific judgment, a legal result so that we can win in the long run. Nonetheless, in the meantime, if they want to repay 52% of the money that has already been paid out, they could return it to Canadian forest companies. We are talking about \$1 billion that is sitting somewhere. It could help the forest companies. Many of them do not lay off anyone. The employees continue to work at the expense of profits.

In the Speech from the Throne, the Prime Minister of Canada clearly said we would move forward and find new approaches. Together, we will be able to find solutions. It will not be easy, but we must work together in cooperation with all the political parties, for the future of our young people in particular.

• (1305)

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was interested in one of the comments the member made about regional programs.

I wonder if he could take a minute to explain why he does not think those are programs that could be fair and equitable, or that they only concentrate on urban areas and the rural areas are left out. We in western Canada sometimes feel that the regional programs do not work. I would like his thoughts on that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy St-Julien: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. There are the large urban centres, but let us take for example the CED, Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, which looks after resource-based regions. I have been advocating for several months that small communities in resource regions should take part.

The best example we have is FedNor, in northern Ontario. We would really like to have an economic development agency for the resource regions and the small communities, and even the larger ones, in those regions.

There is one example in Quebec at present. One in all of Quebec. Speaking of the large urban centres, they are grabbing projects worth \$24 million.

There is western diversification; we know how that works. In the Maritimes, there is the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, or ACOA, and in Ontario, FedNor. But we in Quebec would like our smaller regions to have an agency just for the resource-based regions with appropriate criteria for development.

What is most important—and I am coming to a conclusion—is getting up-to-date criteria. People must not wait a year. Decisions must be made the same week or the same month as the file is submitted. Because, when our bank manager loans us money to make a purchase, he makes the decision in one or two weeks. Right now, the big agencies make people wait between three and a half and five months. Promoters are exasperated. What is important is to listen closely and give an honest answer immediately. Do not keep promoters waiting for nothing. In my opinion, 30 days is long enough. It is possible to give the resource regions a positive answer for a good project.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Also, in this final session of the 37th Parliament, I want to thank my constituents, in particular all those people that I will be losing because of a political reorganization of my riding to remove the western portion and add an eastern portion, I guess just to make things a little difficult. I want to thank all of those people for their support over the last 11 years.

My general comment about the Speech from the Throne is that I sat in amazement thinking of the things that were being said and how much they were going to cost. Then I was amazed further at how many things were left out and I would like to talk about those. Then specifically I would like to talk about what the Speech from the Throne had to say about environmental issues.

Much of what the Prime Minister put in the Speech from the Throne we heard again on the CBC. The highlight of that had to be the grade 5 students who did such an excellent job. I would tell the Prime Minister that I enjoy answering questions from grade 5 students as well because they come right from the heart and they are really honest. Probably his best answer of the whole evening was the fact that he watches CBC news before he goes to bed at night. That was very enlightening.

The reason I came to Ottawa was that I felt that this place was corrupt. I felt that this place did not know how to spend money. I could not believe the debt that the country had built up.

Today the debt is \$32 billion higher than it was in 1993. It could be said that not very much has been accomplished if that was one of the major issues and it is now \$32 billion higher. That debt is being left to our children and our grandchildren. That is one of the reasons we came here.

It galls me when I hear the members across the way talk about how they have dealt with the debt. It has not grown as fast, but certainly it is now \$32 billion higher than it was in 1993 when the member for LaSalle—Émard became the finance minister.

The Address

When we look at the promises in the throne speech, we see promises about health, which is the number one issue for Canadians. We see a promise that wait lists will be reduced. Red book one said that waiting lists would be reduced and of course in red book four it now says that waiting lists will be reduced. I think Canadians are starting to say that it is easy to put this rhetoric in, but when is the government going to deliver and actually do something that reforms and revises our health care system?

We see a promise of .7% for foreign aid. In red book one it said that we would increase our aid to foreign countries and of course, we are now at less than .2%. Obviously we have gone in the opposite direction there too. Many of the farmers, many of the cities, many of the students that come into our offices also ask, "What about us? If you are going to increase your foreign aid help, what about us?"

For the military, the great pride in 1993 was to cancel the helicopters. Now in red book four we are going to buy helicopters, but that is still a few years down the road. All of us still have in our minds the helicopter lying on its side on that ship. Those 40 year old helicopters are going to be 50 years old before we replace them and our young men and women are forced to fly in them.

We are going to have greater intelligence services and more security. That is great to say and all of us want that security. Terrorism is a horrible threat. However, the environment minister's feeling is that it is not all that bad and not a major threat.

Then the government talks about our social programs. The gap between the rich and the poor certainly has not changed. If anything it is worse.

● (1310)

How long has the aboriginal issue been around? Obviously according to the throne speech we are going to fix that. There are no real details or idea of the cost or no real focus on how we would do that.

Western alienation is a really big problem and we are certainly going to fix that. Yet we find out that our elected senators are not going to be named. We find out that the Wheat Board is just fine, although only Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta are forced to sell their grain through a government agency, They are unable to sell their own grain. Farmers cannot take a bag of wheat across the border and give it to a 4-H club without going to jail for it. One of my constituents went to jail for 23 days for taking a bag of grain and donating it to a 4-H club across the border. That is western alienation and there is no mention of fixing things like that.

It was going to cost \$2 million for gun control and it has now cost over \$1 billion. It is not working. I received 13,000 letters in my constituency office about former Bill C-68. We are not going to fix that. We are not going to have a free vote in the House.

That is what western alienation is all about. Why did the Prime Minister not deal with those problems in the throne speech?

We are going to help the cities. That is just wonderful. We are going to give back some of the GST but we will come up with a plan later, the cheque is in the mail. We are going to help them with their infrastructure. We have been saying that for years and years. Red

book one said that. Red book four says that. I assume that if we have a red book 10 it will say that, but not much will happen.

If we did all of those things, the real question is who would pay for it? Obviously we are not going to go into deficit again. We certainly would not want that to happen. I guess we are just going to increase taxes if in fact we are going to deliver on the promises in the throne speech.

More important, what was omitted? Agriculture and BSE and those young farmers were omitted. Those people are losing their way of life. They are going under. They are finished. A whole culture is gone. That is part of western alienation too but there is no mention of it. There is some fancy statement about the government being dedicated to the agricultural way of life but it is not. There is nothing in there that says the government is dedicated to helping those people out.

There is no mention about what is going to happen about taxes. There is no mention of debt reduction. Remember that every man, woman and child owes \$40,000. The minute a child is born in this country, he or she owes \$40,000. There is no mention of dealing with that. There is no mention of justice issues, about police, about policing problems, about gangs, about drugs.

I read a book over the holidays about how the gangs are taking over Canada. It is scary when we hear what the Hell's Angels are doing and how they have infiltrated government, how they have infiltrated business, how they have infiltrated the police, how they have infiltrated our whole society. There is no mention of that in the throne speech, but that concerns people.

Senate reform also has not been dealt with. We are going to have more free speech. We are going to have more democracy. Six days into this new session, the government used closure. It took the other prime minister over a year to do that. The government used closure again to shut down debate in the House. What are people to think when they hear that?

Turning to environmental issues, as the Conservative Party's senior critic for the environment I have been active in a number of these files. First, on the issue of contaminated sites, it is great that we are going to spend \$3.5 billion over 10 years, but much of that money was already included in the 2003 budget. Is it not nice when the government announces the same money over and over again and tries to take credit for it. Let us get on with it. Let us prioritize those sites and show an action plan of what we are going to do.

The Address

It is great that we have \$500 million over 10 years for other sites, even those that are not federal. It is great that we are going to help the Sydney tar ponds, but we have put \$66 million into studies and we still have not done anything. When are we going to do something? Remember that this money amounts to \$50 million per year. That is not going to cover a heck of a lot of cleaning up of contaminated sites.

• (1315)

There are brownfields in all of our cities that are going to take a lot of money. They could be productive, taxable sites within our communities. That would be a way to help out the communities. Uranium mines in the north are leaking into our rivers. These things have to be dealt with, but we need a plan. I do not see that plan.

As far as Kyoto is concerned, climate change is occurring. Climate change has always occurred and will continue to occur. There is no question about that. The big question is how much does it have to do with natural processes and how much does it have to do with humans? Let us err on the side of caution and say that humans do play a role in this, but let us get the science behind it first and use that to develop our program.

The environment minister acts like Chicken Little as he runs across the country. I have listened to his speeches all over the place, and my God, the sky is falling. He says there are catastrophes occurring everywhere; there is no snow, there is drought; there is pestilence coming across the whole world. It is just terrible and if we do not do something the polar bears will drown, the native people will be swimming and the Maritimes will be flooded. The whole world is about to end. This guy should be written up in the cartoons.

What does the chief meteorologist for Environment Canada say? He says that there is no proof that extreme weather is caused by global warming. The minister says that in his view climate change is the most severe problem we are facing today, more severe than terrorism. I do not know how many people would agree with that. I doubt the people in Bangkok, or Afghanistan, or in other parts of the world where they are constantly worrying about threats of terrorism would agree with that.

We have agreed that we will be 6% below 1990 levels, which will be a 240 megatonne reduction in CO₂ reductions. We now have a plan, so to speak, that is going to pick all the low fruit and could conceivably result in a 180 megatonne reduction by 2010. Many countries, 14 of the 15 EU countries, are saying they do not think they can reach their targets by 2010. Those guys have it easy compared to us. We have a huge country, we have a cold climate, we do not have much infrastructure, et cetera. Remember as well that the United States, China, India, Mexico and Brazil, those big polluting countries, are not part of the whole Kyoto process. Remember as well that 8 out of 10 provinces say that they would want more input before they would agree to try to achieve those targets.

All of that said, we look at the government plan and see big industries being asked to reduce by 55 megatonnes. They are saying they cannot achieve that. We are asking average Canadians to reduce their use of carbon by 20%, the one tonne challenge, 20 megatonnes is all that will be. By the way, for those 20 megatonnes so far we have spent \$62 million per megatonne. That is what we have

budgeted for just to reduce 20 megatonnes out of the 240 megatonnes.

The throne speech says that we are going to go the final shot and take the final 60 megatonnes. There is no plan for that. There is no budget for that. No one knows how we would ever achieve that. We have already added up a whole bunch of maybes to get to the 180 megatonnes. Where could we possibly get that other 60 megatonnes? There are only three places we could get it from.

We could get it from the electricity producers who largely use coal across the country. We could do one of two things, we could shut them down from using coal or we could decide to go totally nuclear. Something has to be done because they are the big producers of CO₂. There has to be a plan of what is to be done. That would mean higher electricity rates.

• (1320)

Transportation also has to be looked at. It is fine to say that when people are lined up to go into McDonald's the cars should be shut off while in line and started again to move forward and then turned off. It is fine to say that people should not drive more than 80 kilometres an hour on the highway because that will use less fuel.

I recently drove down Highway 401 at 120 kilometres an hour and I was being passed. We have to convince that whole herd of traffic to drive at 80 kilometres an hour and I do not know how that will be done.

Finally, we also have to regulate heat. We need heat in Canada. In case the Minister of the Environment has not noticed, we have had one of the coldest winters in a long time. In my area we have had more snow than we have had in a long time. I notice the minister does not call it global warming any more. He calls it climate change. That is probably wise. It is hard to sell global warming when it is minus 47 degrees Celsius. It is a tough sell and he might lose his crowd.

The Address

Our economy will be affected if we try to do all those things. What should we do? I do not like being negative all the time. We should have a plan and a made in Canada plan, not a Eurocentric bureaucratic nightmare called Kyoto. We need a plan that consists of three things. It would consist of conservation, many of the measures that the Minister of the Environment already promotes. There are all kinds of ways that we can conserve energy. If we were to give Canadians a vision there are all kinds of things they would buy into and their 20 megaton target could be achieved. They probably could double that if they really bought into the program. Canadians need to be told the reasons, they need to be given a name and they need to be shown ways to help them do it. It cannot be done through these phoney programs that nobody knows how to get and that bug all of our offices because we do not know how to access that \$400 for a new furnace. The plan may be there or it may not be, we cannot get answers.

Then we need to push the transitional sources of energy, such as the hybrid vehicles, the coal gasification and the bio-gas. Exciting projects are out there in that whole area. I do not have the time to talk about them all now. I would have to take three or four days.

We also have alternate energy and that is the future. Everyone, including the oil and gas industry, can buy into that. That is where the real answers are to this whole problem of climate change and the way we can solve it. There is geo-thermal. In my riding of Red Deer we now have two very large buildings heated by geo-thermal energy. The new county office drilled 300 wells into the earth and pump water down through a heat exchanger to heat and cool their building. It is an exciting project. I am proud of this project.

My riding has a swimming pool and recreational complex heated by geo-thermal energy. This is very exciting. I am proud of this. I take people there and show them these facilities.

We have big wind generators. We have wind farms in places such as Ireland, Germany and Denmark. These countries are leaders in this whole area. We should be there also. We should be helping Canadians to achieve these benefits.

Solar energy is another area that has a great future. There are all kinds of solar cells in space that ultimately could be used to generate energy on earth.

Finally, there is the hydrogen energy. If I had more time I would tell members about a little factory that I went to in Vancouver that is creating fuel cells for motor scooters. Anyone who has been to Beijing or any of those kinds of places would have seen that when the traffic light goes red about 50 to 500 motor scooters line up and then there is a big cloud of smoke. Just think of the benefits if they were using these fuel cells.

I could describe many more options. We are so busy here talking about the culture of corruption that we have little time to talk about the environment and what we should really do. We have little time to work on our clean air, clean water and clean land policies.

● (1325)

In the words of the commissioner of the environment, Johanne Gélinas, there is a gap between the federal government's commitments to the environment and its actions. I think that is exactly what we see in the Speech from the Throne, which is why it is so

disappointing to be the environment critic when the government has so little vision on where the environment is really going.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was happy to hear the comments of the hon. member who I know he is deeply devoted and committed to issues surrounding the environment.

I was also going to throw into the hopper things like a sequestration process for coal. I am not talking about the kind that is put in the ground but the kind that uses semi-Canadian technology derived in partnership with the United States, which has so far not been tested in this country. It is a part of the zero emission coal alliance, which I know the hon. member would be interested in.

If we could find a way to burn these things without creating emissions we would solve a number of problems. However it perhaps would also lend itself to abuses, which is that people would not care about what temperature they set their air conditioners at in the summer or, for that matter, their heaters in the winter.

I was completely with the member of Parliament until he talked about the culture of corruption. I find it passing strange that the member's own party is inviting and continuing this ongoing debate about perceptions of, as he called it, the culture of corruption.

Since he mentioned that, I want to ask the hon. member a question. We just had a committee where the Auditor General talked at great length about whether ministers were involved and who could have been involved with this fiasco. The Auditor General said that it was the current minister who was accountable for actions within a department. I question if that is really the expectation. Is it realistic to expect a minister to know everything that is going on in a very large and very complex organization as some of these departments are?

Yesterday the member's colleague, the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, said on TV that the Auditor General had said that the ethics of the government were the worst in 100 years. His party is perpetuating this stuff. The Auditor General clearly said just a few hours ago that she never said that.

My next question is very simple. It is up to the hon. member and his party to stop the culture of corruption and the accusations. However, given what has been said here, how does the hon. member find his task of telling his other members that they really do not have a leg to stand on?

● (1330)

Mr. Bob Mills: Mr. Speaker, this is politics and this is a blood sport that we play down here. Obviously, when mismanagement occurs and money is wasted on such things as the scandals that we see, the worst in probably 136 years, we do have to focus on that. We have to focus on that because if there is corruption in that area, where else is it occurring?

All of that money and all those interest payments that could be used for the projects I am talking about that would make us leaders in alternate energy, developing fuel cells and wind energy, is not available because it has been funneled off through political corruption.

The Address

I did a poll in my riding, and does anyone know what the number one issue was? Thirty-three per cent of my constituents said, long before this, that the corruption and waste that occurs in Ottawa has to end; 19% said health; and 17% said environment. That tells us why we have to focus on it. We have to end that before we can get to the things that will be good for this country.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to expand on the present Liberal government's plans. I know that Kyoto has been spelled out.

I refer to the headlines from the *Ottawa Canadian Press*:

Federal scientists issued warning about mad cow

Health Canada scientists warned their supervisors last year that proposed measures to curb mad cow disease were inadequate, but the department did not heed the advice.

What does the member think it has done to our industry not to have heeded that advice? We could have avoided the shutdown of our industry.

It goes on to state:

Private correspondence within the department reveals sharp dissent on how to respond to Canada's first case of...(BSE)...

She argued that safety measures proposed at the meeting, such as the removal of spinal cords and brains from slaughtered animals, were inadequate—

What would the member say about a plan for Canada's agriculture department?

Mr. Bob Mills: Mr. Speaker, farmers were disappointed when they did not see any direct reference in the throne speech to BSE and the crisis it has created. BSE is changing a whole way of life forever, certainly in western Canada, but also in parts of Ontario, Quebec and I am sure in Atlantic Canada. These people will no longer be in business. We need a secure food supply.

When the British had their problem, we should have sent our people over there to understand the issue. Once they understood the issue they should have come back here and erred on the side of caution to do whatever it took to make sure it did not happen here.

In 1997 we outlawed the feeding of animals to animals but we were too slow and now we are paying the price. This issue will change our whole agricultural society forever. We have lost that resource and I am not sure what will replace it. I am not sure it will be good for Canadians as a guaranteed food supply.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member would not want to misinform Canadians and if he erred I know he would want to be corrected.

He mentioned the tar ponds and said that \$66 million was spent on studies but that no action had been taken. When I visited the tar ponds recently I saw that the landfill had been capped and all the runoff had been re-channelled from the landfill which was part of the problem. A sewer interceptor has been constructed to take raw sewage out of the tar ponds. The structures have been removed. I saw a lot of optimism in the community around the work that was being done by the joint action group of both the federal and provincial governments in resolving this.

There is now jubilation in the fact that the government has committed funds for the long term fix. Solutions have been identified by the community. This is not a project that will be done over the

summer. It will take many years because it is a very sensitive area and it will take a long time to clean.

I am sure the member would like to comment on that.

•(1335)

Mr. Bob Mills: Mr. Speaker, I visited the tar ponds in 1994 and it was a horrible mess. I agree that the \$66 million that has been spent has started the move forward.

However there are 10,000 sites in Canada and we are talking about \$500 million. How much will it take to finish the job with the Sydney tar ponds? As the member knows it will be a lot of money. It could easily take that \$500 million. I believe that is our number one crisis area.

Let us also look at the other 10,000 sites and come up with some sort of plan for those. We cannot do it overnight. I am glad for the people in the tar ponds area who were dedicated to it. As environment critic it is my job to focus on the tar ponds and get on with it.

However let us not waste money planning and discussing. Let us put it into some action. The more action the better. The member has indicated some of it but it needs a lot more.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member pointed out a little earlier a concern of his constituents talking about the amount of so-called corruption. I do not want to harp on this point but in terms of the Auditor General, I think it was very clear in her presentation this morning that that was not the case.

I cannot think of a single member of Parliament sitting in the House of Commons today who could be described as fitting that bill.

What is the hon. member doing in his own riding, rather than pandering to that of kind myth about what is going on here, to elevate rather than denigrate the position of members of Parliament, including his own position?

Mr. Bob Mills: Mr. Speaker, I have sat through these public inquiries before. I will go back to the Somalia inquiry in which I was involved as the foreign affairs critic. Some terrible things happened there. We sent it to a public inquiry and after almost two years we decided to simply dissolve it. A couple of little guys went to jail but nobody higher had anything happen to them.

We then had the tainted blood, hepatitis C Krever report where again terrible things had happened. We ended up blaming the Red Cross because it was a good target. The little guys were booted out and we set up our own blood agency. We paid off some people but not others.

The Address

Then we had the APEC inquiry which was really interesting. We saw the hit men for the prime minister out there organizing it, the Jean Carles and so on. Guess what happened to that inquiry? It was shut down too. We did not do anything and nobody went to jail.

I guess I have to be a little skeptical. The Prime Minister has said there are 14 crooks here. When are they going to jail?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): It remains to be seen.

The hon. member for York South—Weston.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to be able to stand in the House representing my constituents in York South—Weston in reply to the Speech from the Throne, and in particular to speak within the context of those concerns that I think are typical not only of York South—Weston but of constituencies right across this country.

I have the advantage of being able to use the hindsight that comes from the throne speech having been given last week. Having now had the opportunity to talk with and listen to many of my constituents in York South—Weston, I would like to just elaborate on some of their reactions. In doing so, I want to place that in the context of the culture that has been described and the motivation that has been attested to by the previous speaker, to some extent, because I would not like to think that all of the members of the House come here solely to fight the culture of corruption.

We are all here to establish a culture of accountability, and I think that is really what the member was trying to say. In my experience, he has been a very positive and very effective member, particularly on the environment committee. I would like him to know that I hold him in that high regard, and I would like to congratulate him on the positive contributions that he has made. I would not like to think that people would conclude he meant he was here solely to fight corruption, to be sort of the modern day equivalent to the ghostbusters, that there was any magic mechanism that was going to clear some of the problems, environmental, social and economic, for which we are here to find solutions.

I would like to talk about what constituents in York South have indicated are their primary concerns.

There is absolutely no question that the quality of our health care system is foremost and top of mind. There is a higher than average number of constituents in my York South riding who are elderly. Just recently the exposé on care for the elderly has made it graphically and profoundly obvious that we have to do better in the area of looking after the legacy that we have, which is to nurture our elderly, those who have given us the quality of life and the respect that we have internationally, those who have provided us with the example, the symbol of what is important in the world in terms of quality of health. We are falling short in terms of providing that for our elderly.

The throne speech is very dynamic in terms of focusing on our health care system, both reminding us of the shortcomings, the professional shortcomings in terms of our medical professions, as well as reminding us that this is a challenge, top of mind, and that we must mobilize every resource we can. To that end, the Prime Minister did follow through with respect to the \$2 billion that is going into improving our health care system. There is more to be

done, but that is a concern that has been expressed by my residents in York South, one that I thought I should articulate to the House today.

Also with respect to top of mind issues is this whole issue of jobs and employment. The residents of York South are very representative of the international patterns of immigration—multicultural, ethnic and religious—that have come into our country. York South—Weston is the kind of constituency where we build a cohesive and caring society.

● (1340)

I might say that after 9/11, with a large number of residents coming into York South—Weston from Muslim based countries, we worked together to make sure that in our educational system, in our schools and in our community associations and so on we all would be aware that we indeed are responsible for our neighbours.

Again, the throne speech is a speech that talks about the international transformation that is taking place and how we have to look at the character and nature of our communities. In everything we do and everything we enunciate, we have to remind ourselves that we are responsible, if not for our own human rights, for the human rights of all in our country and in fact in our world.

The throne speech makes a great commitment to that international quality and character of human rights. I think that is what the Prime Minister meant when he said that in some respects we will take the pride that we had back in the Pearsonian and Trudeau days in building that international character, build upon it once more and not only transform our own country in terms of how we feel about it, but take it out beyond our borders.

People are concerned in terms of how we create jobs, how we create employment. Just recently as a result of the throne speech, we have had announcements made with respect to using the sectoral council mechanism, a community based mechanism that involves business, the corporate sector and labour and brings them together in terms of looking at programs whereby we can develop new skills for those who have found themselves displaced in the employment sector. It is to reinvest not only in our young people, which is very important, through our educational system, but also in those who have lost their jobs, to retrain them and bring them back into the mainstream of economic life in a fulfilling and responsive way. The throne speech talks about that. In fact, we have started to act on it in terms of job creation and value added activity in our communities.

Residents of York South—Weston also have talked about the quality of life in our cities. Of course our cities really are the incubators in which all of the very high value added activity in a civic society occurs.

I am very pleased, having been one who has spent the majority of my public life in municipal government, that the throne speech outlines the understanding that the quality of life in civic society really is generated through municipal governments, municipal orders of government across the country, and that it makes a statement, not just of idle faith but of commitment, that the first step, in terms of the GST rebate, will allow the municipalities to make their investments of that money. No longer will it be streamed into a tax stream. It will now be used for reinvestment.

The Address

Whether it is through housing initiatives, initiatives for the homeless, or initiatives with respect to investing in capital programs or infrastructure above and beyond the existing programs that have been announced by the government, municipalities can make those decisions. That is very important, because we must not feel, in a paternalistic way, that we understand all the ills of municipalities and that we have to, from the top down, dictate those areas in which they should spend this money that would ordinarily go to the GST. That is a statement of faith that municipalities, in a responsible manner, can reinvest in those things that will add value and quality to life in the cities.

• (1345)

With respect to the kinds of concerns that have been expressed by the people in York South—Weston, we also have looked at the environmental legacy, which just cannot be taken lightly. We look at the environmental legacy, and yes, a minority of scientists think that global warming and the greenhouse effect and so on is not the compelling issue that we should be focusing on, perhaps, but by far the majority in the scientific community feels the opposite way.

The throne speech takes that on as a responsibility: for us to take every initiative we can to deal with that legacy. Not only the people in York South—Weston are concerned about this legacy, but the people across the country are concerned, I think. Be they in rural or urban areas, they are concerned about the implications of environmental degradation.

We hope to invest more as the economy expands. As we have adopted our partnership, building with the cities and the provinces, we hope we can invest in new technologies that add value to economic life, in the kinds of initiatives that my colleague preceding me talked about in terms of innovative environmental technologies and transportation technologies, which not only can be used here in Canada but can be exported and can add value to the transportation sector in terms of jobs and so on. At the same time, they can allow the cities to grow and deal with urban sprawl, environmental degradation and so on.

The throne speech is a true commitment, an act of faith, that we can answer the concerns not only of the people of York South—Weston but of people right across the country and that we can do better in the environmental area.

In terms of Canada's role in the world, coming from a constituency like York South—Weston, which is really a microcosm of constituencies across the country, very diverse in background and so on, these people would want to hear us talk, too, about the kind of world they know so well. They would want us to talk about what that world view looks like to us in terms of government policy and what we intend to do in terms of building a better world, not only here in Canada, but for a world that would reach back to their roots, that would give them the opportunity to say, "Yes, this is a legacy that we bring to this country, but it is one that the collective community all starts to share".

The people of York South—Weston have asked, "In terms of Canada's role in the world, what does the throne speech say?" Does it match the dreams and aspirations of those people? Does it build on the legacy that past generations in this country have given us? Is it the kind of legacy such that we can look into the future and say that

this society we are building, this dynamic society, this transforming society, will be a beacon of hope in a world that appears to offer very little hope for so many people, be they in Africa, in Southeast Asia or in South America and the Caribbean?

The throne speech reminded me of the Pearsonian outlook, in which those of us who were raised through that period of time were so proud of that new nation, Canada, having come out of two world wars and the Korean war, having taken our place in peacekeeping and having led the way in diplomatic initiatives and in the development of countries where the needs were so great. The throne speech to me was not a trip backwards to try to find some nebulous concept that we might be able to just latch our dreams to, but a real solid foundation of accomplishment.

• (1350)

During the tenure of Prime Minister Trudeau we used our diplomatic efforts to reach out to the Chinese and the People's Republic of China. Where would we be today had it not been for those successful outreaches? The United States then came in and we now find ourselves, at the very least, in a very difficult area of the world in terms of North Korea. At least the People's Republic of China is being supportive in terms of contributing to international stability. All of these are foundation blocks of that kind of international outreach work and have been cumulative.

The throne speech talks about that. It talks about an era where we had this evangelical outreach, and I say that in a non-religious sense, of doing more in the world than that which the world had given us. It talks about the creation of a Canada youth corps where we would look at our young people who are educated and concerned environmentally, socially and economically. They are capable. They want to have a role to play in building this country and making this world better. We are going to invest in them, make them our diplomats, and give them the opportunity to go out and represent what Canada really is all about in terms of its quality.

When the people of York South—Weston talk to me about the kind of world that we are building together, they see a role in it for, not only themselves in terms of how they served past generations, but their young people coming into the mainstream of Canadian society and carrying out international roles.

I am proud of the fact that the Prime Minister, at some risk and to some degree of cynicism, invited Bono to talk about our international responsibilities at the convention on that Saturday night. The atmosphere in the Air Canada Centre was electric when Bono reminded us of our responsibilities in terms of building a strong society here and using that to mirror to the international community responsibilities such as the AIDS epidemic, those who are maimed by landmines, and children in hospitals.

That still continues to go on. When we look at the international situation, we can see the responsibility and the accountability that we have, to be not only as good as we can, but to be the best so that we can continue to build a strong national and international community.

All these things are what I feel the people of York—South Weston want to see articulated, represented and characterized in a progressive and positive way. There is so much to do. The throne speech is merely a template, a philosophical concept right now in terms of what we stand for. Our budgets and actions will be the testimony to whether we are serious. This member, along with, I believe, the members of the House, is serious about taking the philosophy of the throne speech and implementing it into concrete action.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1355)

[English]

SOCIAL AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT INNOVATIONS

Mrs. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring to the attention of the House the Social and Enterprise Development Innovations learnsave program, which is operating in my riding of Kitchener Centre.

The learnsave program helps 150 low income families in the Waterloo region learn valuable skills by contributing to a matched learnsave account. This enables unemployed and underemployed Canadians, through these accounts, to invest in education and skills training, as well as improving financial planning. These skills can be leveraged to gain opportunities for new sources for income and education.

Approximately 95% of the participants have family incomes under \$30,000 and 98% have liquid assets under \$1,000. Yet, they have contributed over \$60,000 to their savings accounts. This has been matched for a total of \$115,000.

The federal government will continue to fund programs that help Canadians help themselves. I would ask all hon. members to join with me in congratulating SEDI and Lutherwood for their excellent work in Kitchener Centre.

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GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the whole sordid mess known as the Liberal sponsorship scandal will forever go down in our history as one of the worst financial frauds ever perpetrated by a Canadian government.

The focus is quite rightly on the Prime Minister who presided over the whole grotesque affair while he was finance minister. To say he had no idea of what the money launderers like Groupaction were up to is to stretch all bounds of credibility.

Let me tell the House about some of the groups in my constituency who would have loved to have some of that lost quarter of a billion dollar action. Community groups in Merritt, Princeton and Keremeos are still desperately waiting for softwood lumber compensation which the federal Liberals promised.

In Westbank and Naramata, groups still face urgent infrastructure needs which just a fraction of those wasted Liberal funds would have

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satisfied. In Okanagan Falls and Kaleden, they desperately need the resources for two more peace officers to help with local policing. The positive growth in Penticton has increased its need for promised federal funding which has disappeared down the Groupaction sinkhole.

The time is coming for citizens everywhere to take real action, at the ballot box as a group, and put this Liberal fraud machine out of action.

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● (1400)

MUNICIPALITIES

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand before the House today to boast, shamelessly, about my city, Vancouver. For the last three years the William Mercer Index has named Vancouver as the best city in the world in which to live.

Now, for the second year running, the *Economist* also rated Vancouver number one, together with Vienna and Melbourne.

To earn the title of the best place in the world, Vancouver scored a perfect rating on all 12 indicators used by the *Economist*.

However, I will share the glory. Montreal, Toronto and Calgary also ranked amongst the top 16 cities. These rankings reaffirm Canada's reputation as one of the best countries in the world in which to live.

We all know that our cities have problems. This is why our Prime Minister made their rejuvenation a top priority in the Speech from the Throne. Just imagine what the world will say when our cities finally achieve their full potential.

* * *

SPORTS

Ms. Sophia Leung (Vancouver Kingsway, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has many talented young athletes. This is not new. We know of our star athletes in many sports whether it is hockey, skiing, skating or curling. So far in this winter season of 2004, Canadian athletes have reached the top of international podiums on over 80 occasions in 8 different winter sports.

Speed skaters like Jeremy Wotherspoon, our freestyle skiers like Stephanie St-Pierre, and our bobsledders like the team of Pierre Lueders and Giulio Zardo or our junior men's hockey team, week in and week out proudly represent Canada on the international stage.

Today I wish to congratulate all of our athletes, their coaches and the sport organizations supporting these achievements. As we look to the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games just six years away, we know that Canadians, with the continued support from governments and the private sector, will be ready to shine.

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[*Translation*]

KESKINADA LOPPET

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thousands of cross-country skiers from around the world will be gathering in the Outaouais from February 13 to 15 for the Keskinada Loppet.

The Keskinada is one of 14 major cross-country ski races that make up the international Worldloppet circuit. Entrants include elite skiers and entire families.

Participants in this 26th edition include Beckie Scott, who earned a gold medal at the Salt Lake City Olympic Games in 2002.

This world-class event will bring together over 3,000 skiers, representing more than 22 countries, from the four corners of the globe.

[*English*]

The Keskinada Loppet is the largest Canadian cross-country ski event and represents a great opportunity for cross-country enthusiasts of all levels and ages. It is a great winter tradition, a truly Canadian experience.

[*Translation*]

I invite my hon. colleagues, and all Canadians, to come and have fun outside, celebrating our beautiful Canadian winter in the Outaouais.

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[*English*]

EQUALIZATION PAYMENTS

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since being elected in 1997, I have pointed out on many different occasions the frustration felt by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in seeing their natural resource revenues clawed back by Ottawa through reductions in our equalization payments.

Let me put it in perspective. Six years from now the provincial revenues from the Hibernia, White Rose and Terra Nova oil fields will total \$1.1 billion. However, the federal government will claw back \$900 million of that amount through corporate taxes and reductions in equalization payments.

Simply put, Newfoundland and Labrador will get to keep \$200 million, a mere 18% of the \$1.1 billion in revenues it will collect in that year. Equalization might be the name of the program, but clawback is the name of the game.

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● (1405)

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. David Price (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for several days now, NATO forces in Kabul, Afghanistan have had a new commander.

He is Lieutenant-General Rick Hillier, who is responsible for some 6,000 soldiers, 2,100 of them Canadians, from NATO member countries.

We are all aware of the tremendous risks these soldiers face every day. They deserve our respect and our unconditional support.

The international community is counting on us to help Afghanistan become a country where stability, democracy and prosperity are once again part of daily life. Our country, through its brave soldiers, has an opportunity to leave its mark on history and build a better world. This government will not back away from this challenge.

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CULTURAL PROGRAMS

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the federal government abolished the sponsorship program, it announced that the Minister of Canadian Heritage was now responsible for funding the cultural and sports events formerly subsidized by this extremely controversial program.

However, to date, the Minister of Canadian Heritage has not made any announcements. This situation is hardly reassuring for Quebec's cultural communities, which are quite concerned about the future of numerous events.

In fact, the Regroupement des événements majeurs internationaux (REMI), which represents some twenty cultural and sports events, sounded the alarm.

The Bloc Québécois has always condemned the conditions attached to the sponsorship program. However, the government should not penalize the cultural communities. The minister must tell us where she is going to invest and how much is available.

The money for culture must go to culture, without any strings attached.

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[*English*]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fourth and final conference of the Stockholm International Forum Series was held January 26 to 28. The Stockholm International Forum 2004 focussed on "Preventing Genocide: Threats and Responsibilities".

The focus was on the future, underscoring the principle of the international community's responsibility for preventing genocide and discussing the pivotal report on the right to protect, R2P.

The conference discussions centred on how to identify emerging threats, how to react before it is too late, and how to recognize groups identified as potential targets. Using the many avenues available to it, be they diplomatic, legal, economic, military and/or humanitarian, how can the international community better respond to the prevention of the massacre of peoples?

Over 60 countries participated in this forum. The leadership of Canada was evident throughout and members of the House can be proud of this country's leadership role in the efforts to safeguard democratic principles and human rights, most particularly through strengthening the United Nations and the multilateral system.

* * *

SCOTT TOURNAMENT OF HEARTS

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to announce that Red Deer will be hosting the Scott Tournament of Hearts from February 21 to 29. Ticket sales have been fantastic for this Canadian women's curling championship. Already over 92,000 tickets have been sold for this sporting event.

As always, the volunteers have answered the call in Red Deer. There will be over 600 of them in place to make sure everything runs well during this nine day tournament. I want to say a special thanks to them and to all the organizers, because without them this event could not take place.

The Tournament of Hearts is another feather in the cap for Red Deer and area, and shows what an excellent job we do in hosting a major sporting event. I am very proud of my riding.

I invite all members of the House to Red Deer to this year's Tournament of Hearts and I invite you especially, Mr. Speaker, to attend.

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[Translation]

CANADIAN ATHLETES

Mr. Christian Jobin (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has an exceptional pool of talented young athletes, something we have long known. Our athletes have built a tradition of success in hockey, skiing, skating, curling and other sports. So far this year, Canadian athletes have stood more than 80 times on international podiums in eight different winter sports.

Whether it is our speed skaters, such as Jeremy Wotherspoon, our freestyle skiers, such as Stéphanie St-Pierre, our bobsledders, such as Pierre Lueders and Giulio Zardo, or our junior hockey players, Canadian athletes proudly represent Canada on the international stage, week after week.

Today, I want to congratulate all our athletes, their coaches and the sports organizations for their support in these achievements. With less than six years until the 2010 Olympic and ParaOlympic Games in Vancouver, we can already anticipate the stellar performances of those wearing our colours, with the support of all levels of government and the private sector.

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• (1410)

[English]

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago today, on February 12, 1994, a remarkably courageous young Canadian woman, Sue Rodriguez, died.

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Sue was living with ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease, and she led a national legal and political campaign to change the Criminal Code to permit terminally ill adults to choose for themselves the time of their death and to allow a doctor to assist them in dying.

New Democrats, representing a strong majority of Canadians, call upon the government to join countries like the Netherlands and Belgium to change this often cruel and inhumane law. We also call for far more supportive resources for palliative care in Canada.

I urge the new Prime Minister to keep the promise that was made 10 years ago after Sue Rodriguez's death by former prime minister Jean Chrétien to allow a free vote in the House on this important issue. In her final words to Canadians, Sue Rodriguez said, "I hope that my efforts will not have been in vain". Let us heed the eloquent plea of this brave woman, a Canadian hero, and change this law.

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[Translation]

DIOCESAN CHURCH OF JOLIETTE

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the centenary celebrations of the diocesan church of Joliette have just been launched. The theme: Fire up your heart...Dare to hope.

In 1904, the church of St-Charles was made the cathedral of the new diocese of Joliette, which at the time comprised 40 parishes and one mission. Mgr. Joseph-Alfred Archambault was its first bishop. The diocese has had its great moments since then, but its tragic ones as well. These include the fire in 1935 that levelled the convent of the Congrégation Notre-Dame.

Celebrations and activities will fill the coming months as the diocese celebrates this historic event, which will remain engraved in our memories. These will include a youth rally, outdoor activities, a procession through the city, the Lanaudière painting and sculpture exposition, a travelling exhibit, another large rally and a centenary pilgrimage. I invite everyone to come and help mark this joyous yet solemn occasion, as the Diocese of Joliette celebrates its founding on January 27, 1904 by His Holiness Pope Pius X.

My sincere best wishes for a highly successful celebration to Mgr. Gilles Lussier, the president of the centenary celebration committee Réjean Parent, and his whole team of volunteers.

* * *

CLAUDE RYAN

Hon. Yvon Charbonneau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the passing of Claude Ryan, Quebec and Canada have just lost a remarkable man, a man whose intellectual and political pursuits left an impact on 40 years of our history.

The indefatigable Mr. Ryan was involved in all our social and political debates, from the time of the quiet revolution until very recently. I knew him as an editorial writer and as a minister who did an excellent job, particularly in the educational sector.

A proud Quebecker, he was able to rally around him a broad social and political coalition in his opposition to the October 1970 war measures. I am proud to have been part of that coalition as a member of the labour movement.

Oral Questions

Throughout all those years, Claude Ryan never stopped working to have Quebec recognized as a strong society, a respected society taking its rightful place within the Canadian federal entity.

Thank you, Mr. Ryan, for all that you contributed to the public life of our country. Thank you for all your advice to me over the years; it played a large part in my decision to enter politics in 1994 in order to defend the unity of our country, to defend Quebec, and to defend those most often forgotten by the government.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know the devastating effect that BSE border bans have had on our cattle farmers. What many fail to understand is that these bans affect many more producers and types of livestock than just cattle. The current ban affects species that are not affected by BSE, like bison, sheep, goats and cervids. These farm families are desperate, too.

The government has ignored these other livestock farms as well. The government has failed to provide them with any help, direction or hope that their lives will return to normal in the foreseeable future. The government needs to focus on helping livestock producers instead of trying to cover up its corruption. The government needs to remember that farm families provide the engine for our rural economies.

If as much effort was put into solving agricultural problems as was put into the Liberal culture of corruption, Canadians would all be much further ahead.

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SKATE CANADA JUNIOR NATIONALS

Hon. Paul DeVillers (Simcoe North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to congratulate the gold medal winners of the Bank of Montreal Skate Canada Junior Nationals held recently in Ottawa.

The winners in the individual category were: Amanda Valentine of Ontario for novice women; Patrick Chan of Ontario for novice men; Jeremy Ten of British Columbia for pre-novice men; Natalie Kwong of Ontario for pre-novice women; Ronald Lam of British Columbia for juvenile men; and Karel Di Bartolo of Quebec for juvenile women.

The winners in pairs were: Sarah Burke and Eric Radford of Ontario for novice; Kyra and Dylan Moscovitch of Ontario for pre-novice; and Katherine and Alexandre Pigeon of Quebec for juvenile.

The winners in dance were: Andrea Chong and Spencer Barnes of Ontario for novice; Joanna Lenko and Mitchell Islam of Ontario for pre-novice; and Katherine Fenske and Martin Nickel of Manitoba for juvenile.

These young Canadian athletes have brilliantly struggled to find the support needed to pursue and achieve their goals of athletic excellence.

Also worthy of commendation for their contributions to the competition, along with all volunteers, are Leslie Jeneau, Kay Bierko and coach Christine McBeth.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

• (1415)

[English]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the culture of corruption, the Prime Minister's latest mantra is, "It wasn't me, it wasn't me". Well, I have seven kids and I have heard that excuse a thousand times.

Will the Prime Minister simply stand up and take his personal responsibility for this Liberal scandal?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a collective responsibility that cabinet assumes and we have all assumed that collective responsibility.

At the same time, there is a collective responsibility to make this right and that means to find out the guilty people and to bring them to justice.

It means that we put in place the measures that would not allow that to happen and this cabinet and the government also accept that collective responsibility.

Mr. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I met with a former Treasury Board president today and she said there is just no way the Prime Minister did not know what was going on. She does not believe him. In fact the former deputy prime minister said exactly the same thing. She is a member of his party, at least for now.

My question is, will the Prime Minister stick to his story of the day, that he was just simply duped and in the dark?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member ought to begin now, after three days of this debate, to deal with the fundamental issues of how we deal with it, who are the guilty people and where do we go from here.

There is a problem which is that the role of the comptroller general, as an example, was eviscerated. The comptroller general did not have the capacity of going to the department. Under the delegation of authority, departments had the complete right, once they were allocated the envelope, to spend the money as they saw fit. That was the problem.

We have said we are going to fix it. We are talking about what we are going to do in the future. Where is the hon. member and his party?

Mr. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is unbelievable. We started out with a national disgrace that required a public inquiry. Next, a small band of public servants were duping the Prime Minister. Now former prime minister Jean Chrétien is the one responsible. It is unbelievable.

Oral Questions

He is the Prime Minister of Canada. He should stand up and act like it.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order please, It is very difficult for the Chair to hear the answer. There was not really a question, but there was an exhortation and I presume there will be another, but we have to be able to hear the remarks that are made in the House. The right hon. Prime Minister has the floor. A little order, please.

Right Hon. Paul Martin: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does not play phony indignation very well.

The fact is what I have said is that there was a small group of people, and associated in the whole act of complicity, according to the Auditor General, were certainly a number of crown corporations. In addition to that there is a group of people who must have given the orders.

The reason we have called for a public inquiry is to make sure that that small group of unidentified people is brought to justice

• (1420)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, speaking of phony, what a wicked web the Prime Minister weaves when he suggests that he knew nothing—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order please, Once again we need to have some order. The hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough has the floor to ask a question. How can anybody answer if they cannot hear the question?

Mr. Peter MacKay: They are sensitive over there today, Mr. Speaker.

What a wicked web the Prime Minister weaves when he suggests today, as he did in his press conference, that he knew nothing of this scandal until the Auditor General reported it just last year.

I have a specific question for the Prime Minister. Prior to the year 2002, did the Prime Minister meet with Chuck Guité, Claude Boulay and others to discuss the organization and distribution of advertising contracts in his home province of Quebec?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a second and supplementary question for the Prime Minister. Was he part of any discussions that took place shortly after the referendum, as a result of that, pertaining to the sponsorship program in his home province of Quebec? In another question, does he specifically deny ever having conversations with the former prime minister, his predecessor, about this sponsorship program?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the sponsorship program was brought in publicly by the government in order to provide Canadians with an understanding of what their government was doing when it was supporting festivals. It was discussed quite generally. It was hardly a secret. That is not where the problem lay.

The problem did not lay with the concept of the sponsorship program, although some approved of it and some did not. The real problem was what happened to certain people who got their hands on the money. That is where the problem lay. That was at the heart of the problem.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine said she raised the sponsorship issue in caucus as early as 1999. She asked, among other things, why grants were going to companies that had not done anything. The Prime Minister said it was an administrative problem. It is not administrative, but criminal to pay money to people who have done nothing.

My question is for the Prime Minister. In light of the principle he has just announced at a press conference, that those who knew and did nothing should step down, should he not lead by example and step down himself?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was the deputy minister himself, when he was testifying before the committee in charge of reviewing expenses, who said that the problem that year was an administrative problem. It was the same year the whole Groupaction affair came to light. But it was the deputy minister himself who, after having done an internal audit, said it was an administrative problem.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by hiding behind a flimsy argument like that, he makes it obvious that this action is criminal. In the case of the Prime Minister, who was finance minister and vice-president of the Treasury Board, could we speak not of departmental solidarity, but rather of departmental complicity?

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think it is much of a revelation to imagine or hear that members of caucus were talking about the sponsorship program. Some may have had concerns about it. That is very likely where the initial concerns came from that led to the administrative review and the internal audit in 2000.

That went on with an administrative review, with an action plan, as far as cabinet was reported to and Treasury Board was reported to, of how to deal with the administrative difficulties. It was the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, then, when he became minister of public works, who identified the problem and referred Groupaction to the Auditor General—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lotbinière-L'Érable.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the member for Hamilton East and former heritage minister said that in her opinion, there certainly had been questions about the sponsorship program at the Treasury Board, and that the vice-president of the Treasury Board and finance minister at the time should have taken the necessary action.

How can the Prime Minister justify doing nothing, when he knew what was going on and it was his duty to act, as the former heritage minister has said?

Oral Questions

• (1425)

[English]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the former minister of public works, in January 2001, sent a letter to members of Treasury Board attaching an action plan which was to address the administrative difficulties that were identified in the internal audit, with the action plan spreading over approximately one year to deal with these administrative issues. That was what was sent to Treasury Board and that is on the record.

[Translation]

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General said in her report that the Treasury Board approved supplementary estimates for the sponsorships and that her responsibility was to check that everything was in compliance.

Why did the vice-president of the Treasury Board not do this?

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is true that Treasury Board approved the request for additional funding for the delivery of the sponsorship program in November 1997, as departments are required to do. The money was approved. It went to the department to process and it handled the program from then, until such time as concerns were raised, at which time the auditor was brought in and action was undertaken. It is not that complicated.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the right hon. Prime Minister, whose excuse on both corporate and government scandals is that he is blameless because he is clueless.

The NDP has told him what is really going on with star wars and it is in the public record in the United States, but the Prime Minister still pretends that he has no clue that missile defence is in fact star wars.

Is the Prime Minister not coming clean on star wars because he believes that there are 14 clever rogue employees in the Department of National Defence who are not asking cabinet's permission to weaponize space?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think there are some rogue members over on the other side, who perhaps will have an opportunity to debate this issue. On Tuesday night in the House, we will have a full take note debate about this issue. We can examine all the potential benefits of the program which we are looking at and all of the problems.

One thing I can assure you of, Mr. Speaker, and the Prime Minister made it clear in question period and this government has made it perpetually clear, we are not engaging in a program which will lead this country to or be engaged in any program which has anything to do with the weaponization of space or star wars.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a funny way to deal with the democratic deficit to have the Prime Minister willing to talk outside the House for half an hour to reporters but not answer questions inside the House from members of Parliament.

I have a question for the Prime Minister. No doubt some Liberal prime minister will one day want thanks for wanting to get to the bottom of how we helped to weaponize space, but it strikes me that both the Prime Minister and President Bush both have trouble being wholesome when it comes to the question of weapons.

Therefore I ask the Prime Minister this. Mr. Bush lied about why he went to war in Iraq and now he is talking about weapons again. I have one very simple question. Does the Prime Minister trust President Bush?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think it is correct for the hon. member to suggest that when the minister responsible for foreign affairs answers a question about foreign affairs in the House it is something to do with the democratic deficit.

This Prime Minister has trust in his cabinet and he has trust in caucus. We work together on this issue. Our caucus is united. We discussed this. This will not take Canada toward star wars. We will engage in discussions with the United States about the security of our country in the North American continent for the best interests of Canada and Canadians, finale.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the sponsorship scandal continues to spread through this whole government. Indeed, we learned that the companies involved in this scam gave money for the election campaigns of the Minister of Health and of the government House leader.

I want to know if the Prime Minister will suspend these cabinet ministers during the public inquiry?

[English]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, political donations are a matter of public record. There is no evidence before the House, before us in government, that links money paid to companies under the sponsorship program directly to political parties or individuals. However, donations are a matter of public record.

What I would like to say is we have four processes going on at the moment: a public inquiry, the public accounts committee, RCMP investigations, and a special counsel appointed for financial recoveries. If there is evidence of any link, please, hon. members, bring it forward to any one of those processes and it will be dealt with appropriately.

Oral Questions

• (1430)

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Prime Minister said the real question is what happened to the people who got the money. Some of those people are sitting in his cabinet. Some of their campaigns received this stolen money funnelled through these sleazy Liberal ad firms in Quebec.

Will the Prime Minister taken action against his members or ministers who received money that was stolen from the public through this scandal and funnelled through to their campaigns?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are engaged in a very important debate. It is a debate as to what happened in the past and it is a debate about what we do going into the future. I have to say that it is to demean the debate, demean the House and demean the members of the House by those kinds of scurrilous statements that do nobody any good.

Clearly what they demonstrate is that the opposition has no idea of what has to be done. The opposition can only engage in that kind of verbal abuse, those kinds of ad hominem arguments, because it refuses to do the real work of a parliamentarian.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a few minutes ago, the Prime Minister said that everything should be open. My question to the Prime Minister is this. Is he prepared to make public the minutes from cabinet meetings where the sponsorship program was discussed and minutes from any Quebec ministers' meetings where the sponsorship program was discussed? Will he be open, as he claims that all Canadians should be on this issue?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could pose a question also. Yesterday the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough said, and I quote, “the auditor has said that the ethics of this government are the worst in a hundred years”. When the auditor was asked that question, she said, “I never said that”. Perhaps he could be a little more accurate when he brings information forward.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is an outrageous response. I asked a serious question. The Prime Minister, a few minutes ago, lectured the country on how he wants to be open. He can be open by releasing those minutes. My question is, is he prepared to do that, yes or no?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the public inquiry has the broadest powers possible. It can go wherever it chooses to go. The difference between this Prime Minister and the opposition is that he does not fear the truth.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services stated that the findings of the internal audit which revealed serious irregularities in the sponsorship scandal were posted on the department's website as early as in the fall of 2000.

How can the Prime Minister still plead ignorance and allude to vague rumours when he knew full well and, moreover, held strategic positions that required him to take action?

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the internal audit was posted, as well as an action plan which was sent to Treasury Board and which identified a number of administrative failures that needed to be corrected and a timeline with which to do it, including training staff, ensuring that there was compliance with the Financial Administration Act, and a number of other processes that were to be undertaken.

That was the report to Treasury Board. That was the response to the internal audit. As far as those members understood, that was being carried out. It turned out that some of those issues were not corrected until the following year.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. Considering that the Prime Minister held such key positions as Minister of Finance and Vice-President of the Treasury Board, that he knew about irregularities taking place on a daily basis in the sponsorship program, and that he refused to take action, does this not make him unquestionably guilty?

• (1435)

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said, once there is a program approved and the money has been allocated, then it was, in the former practice, the responsibility of the minister and the department to take responsibility for the proper expenditure of those funds within the rules set for the program and within the Financial Administration Act. Unfortunately, as we have found, during that period these rules were broken. That is why we have a series of inquiries going into the facts.

As the Prime Minister has said, we want to know the facts, we want to know where the money went, we want to know who is responsible and hold them to account, and they will be.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to explain the Prime Minister's inaction in the sponsorship scandal, one of his close advisors stated that the current Prime Minister complained just once about Jean Chrétien's behaviour with regard to Quebec and had been punished for his attitude by being relieved of his responsibility for the regional federal spending program in Quebec.

Are we to understand from that statement by a close advisor to the Prime Minister that he refused to intervene in the sponsorship scandal because he was afraid of getting rapped on the knuckles a second time? What strong political courage.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all I can say is, look at what we did. The former public works and government services minister undertook a study and made fundamental changes in this regard.

Oral Questions

On December 12, we cancelled the sponsorship program. We have just implemented a full review of the entire matter to determine who should be punished and to implement measures to improve the situation.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister had all the tools he needed at the time to act, but he preferred to keep quiet and not do anything, because he was afraid of getting his knuckles rapped again.

Will the Prime Minister admit that, by not doing anything, by keeping quiet about the sponsorship scandal, he has put his personal interest and his political career before the public interest?

[*English*]

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the day that the Prime Minister was sworn in, he gave instructions that we need to begin work on restoring transparency, accountability and fiscal responsibility.

Within minutes of the Auditor General's report being made public, he ordered a full public inquiry. He issued instructions to review and change legislation, to respond to every single concern that she raised. What is not fast about that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to the former heritage minister, the current Prime Minister was aware of the scandal while he was finance minister. Yet, the Prime Minister claims he knew nothing.

What version are Canadians supposed to believe: that he knew that millions of dollars had been stolen from Canadians, or that he was too incompetent to properly manage their money?

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the former minister of heritage was aware, as were members of cabinet generally, that there were problems with the sponsorship program. They were identified in the 2000 internal audit. They were later referred to the Auditor General. Then there was a change of ministers and—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order please, The hon. Minister of Public Works and Government Services has the floor and it is very difficult to hear the answer with all the noise.

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, in a succession of processes a moratorium was placed on the sponsorship program. Then it was restored, but with very constrained circumstances. Eventually, as soon as the government took office, it was killed.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's own colleagues do not believe him. The member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, the member for Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok and the former heritage minister have all said that this matter was discussed in 1999 and that the Prime Minister was well aware of it. Yet even as of a few minutes ago during his press conference, the Prime Minister was blaming everyone else.

Why will the Prime Minister not accept his responsibility for this scandal?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Oh, Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

• (1440)

The Speaker: Order please, We have to be able to hear the President of the Treasury Board. He has the floor.

If everyone else gives the answer, the poor member for Edmonton—Strathcona will be deprived. He asked the question and he is entitled to an answer from the person who is rising to answer, not from everyone else.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board has the floor.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Mr. Speaker, I am dying to give him an answer.

He has another name to put on that list and that is the Prime Minister himself today. He said yes, once it became known that there was a problem, it was discussed and remedies were brought to bear on this, but let me say this. The Prime Minister has also put in place a process that will get to the bottom of this and will do it openly. I would invite the hon. member, if he has facts to bring forward, to put them on the table.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister can run, but he cannot hide.

One hundred million dollars in commissions were paid to friends of the Liberal Party on his watch as finance minister. That represents all the taxes paid by the hardworking people of Hanna, Alberta, or Sackville, New Brunswick, or Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, or Heart's Delight in Newfoundland.

The Prime Minister should be ashamed of himself. When will he come clean and admit that he knew about the sponsorship scandal?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. It is a terrible thing when that kind of money, taxpayers' money of very hardworking Canadians, is spent in this way. Everybody on this side of the House not only regrets it, but is visibly angry about it.

I agree with the hon. member and I agree with those Canadians who are angry about it. That is why it is so important that we get to the bottom of this, that we find out who is responsible for this. It is also why we have to put in place the structures so that it will never happen again. We are very, very angry about this.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am awfully glad the Prime Minister cares now because in 1999 when he knew about it, he did not care at all.

One hundred million dollars of taxpayers' money went from the government into the hands of Liberal Party supporters. The \$100 million lost on the sponsorship program is equal to the tax money paid by 12,000 Canadians earning the average salary of roughly \$25,000.

I know the Prime Minister is a millionaire and finds ways to avoid paying taxes. How can the Prime Minister justify squandering—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member as an experienced parliamentarian knows full well that there was an interim audit and it showed a series of administrative problems. The deputy minister testified that a management plan had been put in place to deal with those, and the people knew about it. He also went on to say that in fact there was no criminality involved.

It was later then, when the Groupaction material became public, that all of us realized to our horror that there was a fundamental problem. It was at that point that the new minister of public works, and then subsequently the present Minister of Finance, as minister of public works, froze the program, put in place a series of issues, matters—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burin—St. George's.

* * *

FISHERIES

Mr. Bill Matthews (Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

I would like the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to inform the House about the timely Marine Finfish Commercialization Forum that is currently being held in Newfoundland and Labrador.

This industry is very important to the people I represent on the south coast of Newfoundland. Could the minister inform the House about the future of this industry?

Hon. Geoff Regan (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Marine Finfish Commercialization Forum is an opportunity for experts to explore the expansion of Canada's aquaculture industry. As Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, aquaculture is one of my priorities and I am committed to working closely with the provinces and territories to develop a framework to help the industry as it competes on the world stage.

I am confident that we can position Canada as a world leader in the development of a sustainable, competitive and diverse aquaculture sector.

* * *

•(1445)

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food.

There has been one case of BSE in Canada, one cow out of some 15 million. As we know, the Americans closed its border to the import of live Canadian cattle. On the other hand, there has been one case of BSE in the United States and for some strange reason we continue to import American cattle into eastern Canada.

I know that not even a Liberal sponsorship program could help our farmers, but what I want to know is whether or not the minister will create a level playing field and tell the Americans that if they do not open their border for Canadians, we will close our border in terms of their beef imports and will start shipping western Canadian beef to eastern Canada. Will he do that?

Hon. Bob Speller (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the approach taken by the Government of Canada was an approach that was first developed by sitting down and talking with the industry, talking with the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, talking with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and all the provinces. They told us that they want us to get out there to market Canadian beef around the world, to show consumers around the world that in fact Canadian beef is some of the safest beef in the world.

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BROADCASTING INDUSTRY

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the new Minister of Canadian Heritage.

The heritage committee just completed a two year study on broadcasting. It made strong recommendations to protect the cultural sovereignty of our broadcasting industry by maintaining the present foreign ownership restrictions.

With a former president of Rogers AT&T now in the PMO and scandal and corporate cronyism at an all-time high in the Liberal government, will the minister assure us that she will put the interests of Canadians above corporate profits and leave the present foreign ownership rules unchanged?

[Translation]

Hon. H  l  ne Scherrer (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that all the standards will be followed closely and that the points raised by my hon. colleague will be taken into consideration.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just announced in his hastily called press conference that very few Quebec ministers knew the full extent of the scandal. He also said that anyone who knows anything about the scandal should come forward before they are summoned.

My question is for the Prime Minister. If he knows that there are cabinet ministers who are aware of this, will he stand in this House today and disclose who those ministers are?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the opposition is well aware through its requests over 60 times in this House for a public inquiry, that there is now one being established.

Oral Questions

If people have allegations to make, if they have evidence to bring forward, they should come before the public inquiry and under oath, not within parliamentary immunity but under oath, bring that evidence or those allegations before the public inquiry, or make a statement to the RCMP which they will have to take personal responsibility for. If there is evidence, bring it forward. Let us hear it. Let us hear the facts.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said that anyone who knew anything and did nothing should resign. He also said that only a few Quebec ministers were aware of the scandal. They knew of the scandal.

Will he name who they are and if they are in his cabinet, will he stand here and ask them to resign?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that what the member can do if he has a concern is bring it forward, put it on the table, let people look at it. The problem is he wants us to render the judgment before we have the evidence.

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, CPC): Well, first let it be said, Mr. Speaker, that the Prime Minister said the public accounts committee will also deal with this so do not let the Minister of Public Works bury this in a judicial inquiry.

Earlier today the Prime Minister laid the blame on a small number of bureaucrats and some political people and earlier right in this House he acknowledged that the scandal was driven by a few political people. I want to know, the House wants to know, and all Canadians want to know, who were the political people who were driving this scandal?

• (1450)

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): We want to know too, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, CPC): Well, we also want to know, Mr. Speaker, who already has the answer because this week the Prime Minister said that he knew nothing, saw nothing and did nothing until two days ago when the Auditor General's report was released. However, earlier today he was acknowledging that back in 2000 he knew that this problem was going on. So which story is correct, the 2000 story or this week's story?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the chair of the public accounts committee has a very important responsibility. For him to deliberately mislead by stating that what happened in 2000 was anything other than an administrative study, and that the deputy minister of public works came forth and said the problem was an administrative one and it was later that Groupaction occurred, is really unbecoming of him. I would hope that as the chair of the public accounts committee he would show a greater degree of responsibility.

The Speaker: If the Prime Minister was suggesting that something in the question that the hon. member for St. Albert put deliberately misled the House, I am sure he would not want to make that suggestion because that would be, as he knows, unparliamentary. I was not quite sure whether he was referring to the hon. member's question or not, but the Prime Minister will want to review that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General reaffirmed that it is hard to believe that someone could have outsmarted the controls for 4 or 5 years. She added that people had to have known.

Does this not prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Prime Minister, who was right there as Minister of Finance and Vice-President of the Treasury Board, knew but did nothing?

[*English*]

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us quote the Auditor General in her testimony before the public accounts committee today. She said:

Within our system the minister of the department has responsibility of that department. I think, quite frankly, most people would not expect even the minister to know all of the day-to-day operations. Some people would call into question how appropriate it is for a minister to become involved....

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, of all the ministers who are guilty of complicity in this scandal, the Prime Minister is one of the most deeply involved.

Will the Prime Minister recognize that, in his duties as finance minister and Treasury Board vice-president, he not only was in a position to correct the situation but had a duty to do so?

[*English*]

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again a member of the opposition is arriving at a guilty conclusion before the evidence is produced.

If she has facts that back up that conclusion, she should put it in front of the inquiry and see how it is received. If she has any proof then she should bring it forward and we will act on it.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former heritage minister said yesterday that the Prime Minister must have known.

Other Liberal MPs say that they raised red flags about the sponsorship program in the Liberal caucus as far back as 1999. Yet the Prime Minister wants Canadians to believe that everyone in the Liberal caucus knew about the sleeze except him.

Why does the Prime Minister continue to deny the obvious truth that as finance minister he let Canadians down?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was not in the Liberal caucus in 1999. However I am well aware of the open discussion that goes on and the issues that are raised.

However since that time, and it was on an incremental basis, from internal audits to independent forensic audits to Auditor General audits to RCMP investigations following the Groupaction issue, we have constantly been bringing this forward to the public's attention in greater detail.

When the government took office in December we immediately stopped the sponsorship program altogether. We have now, with the Auditor General's report, instituted a whole series of inquiries, commissions and activities.

I ask members to bring the evidence forward, not here in the House but under oath before the—

•(1455)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Provencher.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was in caucus in 1999. Even as the Liberal cone of silence is beginning to crack and the sleaze is oozing out of it, the Prime Minister's pattern of denial and casting off blame continues.

In a press conference he said that as finance minister of Canada his advice was not sought on matters relating to Quebec.

The fact remains that the Quebec caucus knew political abuse was taking place and he said nothing to the public. Somehow he was struck dumb.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am amazed that a former attorney general of Manitoba would use language such as that, acting within the immunity of the House, when there are processes where he may go forward.

I would like to see the member use that language and make those accusations under oath before the public inquiry commissioner or in front of the public accounts committee.

Surely this is not the place to make wild accusations on the behaviour of members of the House. He should come before the committee, under oath and in public, and make his allegations.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that the government has made a strong commitment in the Speech from the Throne to improving foreign credential recognition to ensure that immigrants to Canada can fully participate in the economy.

Could the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development inform the House of the action the government will take on this important issue?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right to draw the House's attention to an issue that is very important for all of us.

We have in recent times invited people from all over the world with credentials that outpace even our own. In fact, we have currently a disconnect between the talent pool and human capital investment that is entering our country and the jobs in which they engage.

Oral Questions

I am pleased to advise the House that today I convened a meeting of my colleagues from the Departments of Citizenship and Immigration, Multiculturalism and the Status of Women, Health, Foreign Affairs and the parliamentary secretary for immigration.

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GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister keeps accusing this group of 14 of dreaming up this corrupt scheme. What could they possibly have to gain from doing that?

Does the Prime Minister really expect us to believe that this group of 14 were so sophisticated that they fooled the entire government, including the cabinet and the Prime Minister?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the statement made yesterday in the House by the Prime Minister was reflecting the view of the Auditor General yesterday morning in an interview where she was distinguishing between the 14,000 employees of public works and the 14 in this small unit who were involved in some way as public servants in this incident. She was in no way, and nor was the Prime Minister, suggesting that there was someone outside in a political or other position who might have been involved as well. In fact, the action of bringing home the ambassador from Copenhagen demonstrates that it was someone outside that 14. That was not—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lakeland.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this culture of corruption is in the cabinet, not in the civil service, but the Auditor General has no authority to do an inquiry into cabinet. She only has authority to do an investigation into the public service.

The Prime Minister has to stop blaming our public servants. He has to start pointing the finger of blame right back at himself, at his cabinet and at the former cabinet.

Will the Prime Minister admit the obvious, which is that he knew what was going on through this whole despicable scandal?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member has failed to understand after three days is the purpose of calling the commission of inquiry. It was called so it could go beyond where the Auditor General could go and in fact go beyond perhaps where the parliamentary committee could go. That is the whole purpose of the inquiry.

In terms of the public servants, let me take this occasion to say that I agree with the Auditor General that those 14 do not make the public service. We can be incredibly proud of our public servants. They are hardworking men and women who give up their lives for the greater good of our country. I am very proud to be part of the institution.

Privilege

● (1500)

[Translation]

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the arguments being used by the Prime Minister are pretty hard to swallow, when the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine says he was present when she raised the issue in caucus, that the report was on the website as far back as the fall of 2000, that he was able to obtain all the details as the Minister of Finance and Vice-President of the Treasury Board. Yet he did nothing.

How can the Prime Minister keep on saying he knew nothing of all this?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the real question is: Why is the member from the Bloc Québécois not prepared to quote the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine? What she actually said is that there were administrative problems relating to the costs, but it was not a question of theft or anything to do with what has come out about Groupaction. It was strictly an administrative problem relating to the costs, when we look at the way funding was allocated.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment.

The Auditor General has said that many national historic sites in the country are showing serious signs of deterioration. She also mentioned that this issue must be addressed within the next two to five years. Three of the five sites described as being seriously impaired are in Ontario, including Fort Henry in Kingston.

What is the government planning to do to preserve these sites of great historic significance?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, chapter 6 of the Auditor General's report closely reflects the annual report of the park service of last year. We intend to look at the recommendations of the Auditor General very closely, as with other areas of her report. We intend to fully implement measures to take care of her concerns.

I can assure the hon. member that as this proceeds I will be reporting to the House on the success in dealing with the sites that are currently listed as being in poor condition.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period I was asked a question by the chairman of the public accounts committee, and was so disappointed by his lack of responsibility that I used the word “mislead”.

I really do not believe that the chairman of the public accounts committee would attempt to mislead and I would like to withdraw the word.

The Speaker: I thank the Prime Minister.

The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on February 10 the Auditor General tabled her report before the House which has given light to evidence of parliamentary contempt in the 1999-2000 “Report on Plans and Priorities” which was signed by the then minister and deputy minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

This is the first opportunity I have had to bring this matter to the attention of the Speaker, as this evidence was confirmed earlier today by the Auditor General during today's meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts, both in oral evidence and in private conversation.

In chapter three, the report of the Auditor General states the following on page 30, paragraph 3.100:

Not only was Parliament not informed about the real objectives of the Sponsorship Program, it was misinformed about how the program was being managed. The parliamentary process was bypassed to transfer funds to Crown corporations. Funds appropriated by Parliament to the PWGSC were used to fund the operations of the Crown corporations and of the RCMP.

She goes on to say:

PWGSC's 1999-2000 *Report on Plans and Priorities*, signed by the Minister and the Deputy Minister, contained the following statement about CCSB:

“The CCSB business line will focus on the following strategies and key activities over the planning period...provide core communications procurement and project coordination services to federal departments that are useful, timely and value added while ensuring prudence, probity and transparency throughout the process.”

The Auditor General then says:

More than half of CCSB's spending was on sponsorships. Prudence and probity in the delivery of the program were certainly not ensured.

That was a statement signed by the minister. So it is clear that the Auditor General has found sufficient evidence to conclude in her report that Parliament was misled. To that end, it is my duty as a parliamentarian to bring forward this evidence and seek appropriate justice on the matter, as I feel there is enough documentation to prove the case.

The Prime Minister himself acknowledged on February 10 of this year that the rules were not followed and that Parliament was not clearly advised. He said:

...the hon. member knows that when money is allocated by a cabinet...it is allocated on the basis that certain rules...will be followed. The problem is that those rules were not followed.

A Speaker in 1978 ruled a matter to be a prima facie case of contempt where the RCMP were alleged to have deliberately misled a minister of the crown and the member for Northumberland—Durham resulting in “an attempt to obstruct the House by offering misleading information”.

On page 225 of Joseph Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, he describes contempt as “an offence against the authority or dignity of the House”.

In the 22nd edition of Erskine May on page 63, it describes ministerial responsibility and states:

...it is of paramount importance that ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity. Ministers who knowingly mislead Parliament will be expected to offer their resignation to the Prime Minister...

The House has always insisted on accurate and truthful information. That is why the direct misrepresentation of a ministry's plans and priorities must be treated as contempt.

Parliament must never be misled or lied to. Parliamentarians and the public must rely on the goodwill and the honour of ministerial presentations and submissions.

I trust the Speaker will take my comments under advisement and return with a ruling. Should the Speaker find that this is a prima facie case of privilege, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

• (1505)

[Translation]

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I absolutely and categorically reject the allegations that have been made and, with your leave, I reserve the right to give a more complete answer very shortly.

[English]

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, page 221 of Joseph Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, describes that:

A prima facie case of privilege in the parliamentary sense is one where the evidence on its face as outlined by the Member is sufficiently strong for the House to be asked to debate the matter and to send it to a committee—

What we have here with respect to the sponsorship program is a scandal and a cover-up, a cover-up that no one denies exists.

We also have the Auditor General reporting that misleading information involving the sponsorship program was provided to Parliament.

A cover-up involves deceit. On page 141 of the 19th edition of Erskine May, it is stated:

Conspiracy to deceive either House or any committees of either House will also be treated as a breach of privilege.

It is not inconceivable that the people involved in the sponsorship program scandal were deceitful and knowingly provided misleading information to someone in the department who, knowingly or unknowingly, provided that information to Parliament.

It is not important at this phase to conclude that a minister knew or did not know. As with the case of the RCMP precedent, it was sufficient to argue that someone along the line provided misleading information deliberately.

No one can argue that there is sufficient cause to believe that the people involved in this scandal and the cover-up of the scandal would deliberately provide misleading information about their activities.

Business of the House

Under the circumstances, I would argue that the evidence on its face is sufficiently strong for the House to be asked to debate the matter and to send it to committee.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House that, by unanimous consent on Tuesday of this week, the House restructured the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The Auditor General's report that was alluded to has already been referred to the committee and, this very morning, the Auditor General appeared before the committee.

Perhaps we might take it for granted that the House has already passed this matter on to the committee and that we must give the committee some time to do its work, something the hon. members apparently do not want to happen.

• (1510)

[English]

The Speaker: The Chair has received the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby and appreciates the comments of the hon. member for St. John's West on the matter.

[Translation]

I also appreciate the comments from the hon. deputy government House leader.

I have listened to the request by the government House leader, who wishes to submit his answers to the Chair soon—probably Monday, or so I hope at least—so that the Chair will have an opportunity to consider the matter raised by the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby.

[English]

Accordingly, I will take the matter under advisement, hear further submissions at a later date and get back to the House in due course.

Mr. Jay Hill: Does that mean we will have a debate on it?

The Speaker: Whether there will be a debate, as the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River knows full well, depends on whether or not a motion follows.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby is prepared to move his motion if the Chair gives authority for him to do so after considering the matter, which the Chair has undertaken to do, of course with all convenient speed.

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if this would be an appropriate time to ask for unanimous consent. Discussions have taken place between the parties and I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, on February 16, 2004, when the question is put on the motion for an Address to Her Excellency, a division thereon shall be deemed to have been requested and shall be deferred to the end of the time for consideration of government orders on February 17, 2004.

Business of the House

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the weekly statement, I have two questions. The first question is to the hon. government House leader. What is the business for the rest of today, tomorrow and next week, if the government is still in existence?

The second question deals with whether or not we will be having a take note debate on Tuesday night. I gave the hon. member some time to think about this.

Tuesday is an opposition day. Usually an opposition day is a day when the concentration is on an issue brought forth by one of the opposition parties. However, we now see government, without any consultation, as has been the process in the past, bringing in a take note debate which deflects from the actual opposition day itself.

I would ask the hon. House leader if he would rearrange to have a government take note debate or any take note debate at any time other than on opposition days, because I believe there is a major contrast, and it sets a bad precedent.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will answer in the reverse order of the questions raised. To my knowledge, there are many precedents in this House of emergency or take note debates being held on opposition days.

Therefore, I gave some thought to the question that was put to me. I am pleased to see that the hon. member opposite is as aware as I am of the fact that we work later in the evening. We will indeed have this take note debate and, after thinking about his proposal, I must unfortunately confirm to him that this take note debate will take place on Tuesday, February 17, as planned.

As for the hon. member's first question, this afternoon, we will continue with the debate on the address. Tomorrow, we will conclude our review of Bill C-2, the Radiocommunication Act, which will be followed by a motion for the referral to a committee, before second reading, of the equalization bill that was tabled this morning.

[*English*]

Monday shall be the final day for the address debate.

Tuesday shall be an allotted day, and of course followed by what we just said, on Tuesday evening we will have a take note debate on the ballistic missile defence issue.

On Wednesday we will consider a motion to refer to committee before second reading Bill C-3 respecting the Canada Elections Act.

Next Thursday shall be an allotted day.

Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, I move:

That a take note debate on the subject of ballistic missile defence take place pursuant to Standing Order 53.1 on Tuesday, February 17, 2004.

● (1515)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion, the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

[*English*]

Hon. Jacques Saada: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is my understanding, and I stand to be corrected, that this standing order makes the motion deemed adopted.

The Speaker: Standing Order 53.1(1) states:

A Minister of the Crown, following consultation with the House Leaders of the other parties, may propose a motion at any time, to be decided without debate or amendment, setting out the subject-matter and designating a day on which a take-note debate shall take place, provided that the motion may not be proposed less than forty-eight hours before the said debate is to begin.

I do not believe it is to be carried automatically. It says it is "to be decided without debate or amendment". So I have put the question to the House and I therefore propose to call in the members.

Hon. Jacques Saada: Mr. Speaker, at the meeting of the leaders of the parties in the House that we held earlier this week, on Tuesday, we had agreement to announce that we would have this debate on February 17. There was agreement to that effect.

The question raised late yesterday afternoon by the leader of the Conservative Party was whether it was possible or not to change that. I told him I would take that into consideration but I could not promise that it would happen that way. So long as I could not arrange it otherwise the only thing which was holding true was the agreement that we had at our leaders' meeting. I believe that this agreement should hold if everyone is to stick to their word as given.

The Speaker: I do not think the agreements that are made between House leaders are ones that are binding on the House. The motion was moved and the question was put. The yeas and nays were called. I have expressed my view. Five members rose, so I do not think we have any choice. I order the bells to be rung to call in the members.

● (1555)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

The Address

PAIRED

(Division No. 7)

YEAS

Members

Adams
 Augustine
 Barnes (London West)
 Bellemare
 Bergeron
 Bigras
 Bonwick
 Brison
 Cannis
 Cardin
 Castonguay
 Charbonneau
 Comartin
 Cuzner
 DeVillers
 Efford
 Frulla
 Gagnon (Champlain)
 Goodale
 Guay
 Harvard
 Jobin
 Karetak-Lindell
 Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
 Kraft Sloan
 Lalonde
 Lastewka
 Lee
 Lill
 Loubier
 Malhi
 Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
 Matthews
 McCormick
 McKay (Scarborough East)
 McTeague
 Murphy
 Neville
 O'Reilly
 Pagtakhan
 Patry
 Peterson
 Price
 Regan
 Robinson
 Saada
 Scherrer
 Sgro
 Simard
 St-Hilaire
 St-Julien
 Telegdi
 Tonks
 Tremblay
 Valeri

Alcock
 Bagnell
 Bélanger
 Bennett
 Bertrand
 Blondin-Andrew
 Boudria
 Calder
 Caplan
 Carroll
 Catterall
 Coderre
 Cotler
 Desjarlais
 Duplain
 Eyking
 Fry
 Gagnon (Québec)
 Graham
 Guimond
 Jennings
 Jordan
 Keyes
 Knutson
 Laframboise
 Lanctôt
 LeBlanc
 Leung
 Lincoln
 Macklin
 Marceau
 Masse
 McCallum
 McGuire
 McLellan
 Mitchell
 Myers
 Nystrom
 Pacetti
 Paradis
 Perron
 Pettigrew
 Proulx
 Robillard
 Rocheleau
 Sauvageau
 Scott
 Shepherd
 Speller
 St-Jacques
 Steckle
 Thibault (West Nova)
 Torsney
 Ur
 Volpe — 110

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
 Barnes (Gander—Grand Falls)
 Burton
 Day
 Elley
 Forseth
 Goldring
 Hill (Macleod)
 Jaffer
 Keddy (South Shore)
 Mayfield
 Mills (Red Deer)
 Reynolds
 Solberg
 Strahl
 Yelich — 31

Anders
 Benoit
 Chatters
 Duncan
 Fitzpatrick
 Gallant
 Hanger
 Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
 Johnston
 McKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)
 Merrifield
 Rajotte
 Ritz
 Sorenson
 Toews

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I declare the motion carried.**SPEECH FROM THE THRONE**

• (1600)

*[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.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne.

Among the kinder words that I could use to describe the speech to open the third session of the 37th Parliament of Canada are uninspiring, directionless, and indistinguishable from the Liberal throne speeches of the last 10 years.

The Prime Minister's throne speech was nothing but a list of recycled promises and empty rhetoric. It was full of clichés and a few vague promises regarding the environment, cultural programs and post-secondary education. Its most striking quality is the fact that it simply ignored many key issues.

In fact, the speech contained almost no references to the most crucial issues for most ordinary Canadian families: tax fairness, health care and safer communities. There was zero mention of the failed billion dollar gun registry boondoggle, only a vague reference to protecting children, and no strategy to reform our failing criminal justice system.

As justice critic for the official opposition, I hoped to hear at least a few words on these matters, but the Prime Minister avoided any mention of them.

The throne speech indicated the government would reinstate the child protection legislation from last year. This legislation, Bill C-20 now reintroduced, came before the House of Commons after years of calls for stronger legislation to protect our children from sexual predators. It is an entirely inadequate response to a growing problem.

When Bill C-20 was in committee, key witnesses advised members that there was little or no improvement to the current law. It did not raise the age of sexual consent for adult-child sexual contact. It did not eliminate the controversial defence of artistic merit.

What we heard was that children would not be protected any better under this bill than they were before. In fact, lawyers spoke in front of the committee. A lawyer of eminence, David Matas, said in fact that the defence of artistic merit opens up further loopholes in the law.

The Address

Child advocates criticized the bill. They included representatives from: Project Guardian, the Office for Victims of Crime, Beyond Borders, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Canada Family Action Coalition and the Toronto Police Service. These advocates were asking that the age of consent be raised from 14 years of age, one of the lowest ages of consent in the western world.

They said that the bill's vague promises to protect children from so-called exploitive relationships would be too difficult to prosecute. They were asking that all defences for the criminal possession of child pornography be eliminated to fully protect children. However, the bill does not do that.

Despite the mounds of evidence to indicate the Liberal proposal would not be effective, there have been no signs from the government that the necessary steps would be taken. Police continue to be handcuffed by archaic legal procedures and a lack of financial resources and manpower.

This is not the only front on which the Liberal government has failed Canada's justice system. Since 1996, child predators, killers, rapists and impaired drivers who kill have had the opportunity to serve their sentences in a fictional prison. In fact, they serve it at home.

House arrest or conditional sentences were introduced into the Criminal Code in 1996 by the Liberal government, not for the purposes of rehabilitation or the safety of Canadians, but simply to lower the incarceration rates in Canada. Since that time, thousands of conditional sentences have been imposed for violent crimes, despite the promise that this is not what the law was intended for.

There was a recent house arrest in Winnipeg. A man by the name of Erron Hogg was sentenced to a two year period of house arrest. It is an appalling sentence to most Canadians and demonstrates a pressing need for law reform. Twenty-three year old Hogg beat a 25-year old university student, Michael Marasco, so violently with an object that he suffered brain damage and spent two months in hospital in August 2001. That individual's dreams of attending law school have been shattered.

There was no relationship between the accused and the victim. It was a cold blooded beating of an innocent Canadian citizen. What do we have? Justice John Scurfield said:

The level of violence was horrific...The results were tragic...This is clearly a case where a period of imprisonment is warranted.

He noted that there was an element of premeditation in this offence. Even Hogg's lawyer agreed that in the usual circumstances a prison term would be imposed.

However, defying logic and common sense, Justice Scurfield gave this individual a two year house arrest. He serves time at home.

•(1605)

The law setting out principles for judges to apply is vague and unclear. Essentially, judges have made their own law. In doing so, they have sent the wrong message to the community, namely that what Hogg and other offenders of his type did was not all that bad and that the consideration of victims comes second to the consideration of what should happen to an offender in these circumstances.

A Conservative government would ensure that conditional sentences are not applicable to serious violent offences, serious sexual offences and offences involving weapons. The laws in sentencing must be changed to ensure that conditional sentences are never available for these crimes.

Despite promises of democratic reform and listening to more ordinary Canadians, the Liberals remain committed to forcing their own MPs to support the greatest debacle of the Liberal regime in terms of the sheer volume of money spent, and that is the problem plagued gun registry. The Prime Minister has supported the registry from the very beginning. He wrote the cheques as the costs were escalating, as ministers stood up and said this was only going to cost \$2 million.

In the background the present Prime Minister, the then finance minister, was busy writing the cheques. He knew the cheques were adding up beyond the \$2 million. He said nothing. He remained silent and his Liberal friends stood up and said that everything was under control, that it would only cost \$2 million. Well today that cost is \$1 billion. That is where the auditor essentially ran out of the paper trail. We are spending approximately \$200 million a year to implement the registry.

The Prime Minister voted to pour even more money into this black hole, even after the failures became evident to the public through the efforts of the Auditor General. And he has put the former justice minister, now the Deputy Prime Minister, back in charge of the registry, the person who poured the most amount of money into this and indeed told Canadians that this was only going to cost \$2 million. She is back in charge with the Prime Minister's blessing.

I would also like to comment on the manner in which the marriage debate is being handled by the government. The recent announcement by the Liberal government to expand, and more important to postpone, the reference on same sex marriage is just another cynical, public, political tactic.

The Liberals' unprincipled approach to the issue of same sex marriage has permeated this debate. Delaying the case until after an election represents blatant manipulation of this issue regardless of whether one is in favour of same sex marriage or not. By bowing down to the courts instead of bringing this issue before Parliament, allowing Parliament to debate legislation that the Prime Minister has brought forward so that we can vote on it as elected representatives of the people, means that the government has clearly disregarded its duty to address the democratic deficit. In fact, it has shown total disregard for the democratic process.

The issue of the definition of marriage should be brought before Parliament and determined by Parliament in a bill before the next election to ensure that Canadians are heard on this important social policy issue.

I would like to comment as well on some of the issues that my constituents are very concerned about, which the Prime Minister and his government have failed to address.

The Address

Agriculture was mentioned only in passing during the throne speech. At a time when our farmers are in greatest need of assistance, the Liberal government refuses to commit any level of funding to ensure that the agricultural industry remains viable in Canada. This is not surprising considering that as finance minister, the Prime Minister slashed agricultural funding by half over the last decade. Under this Liberal government agricultural spending has decreased from 2.8% of the total budget in 1993 to 1.4% of the total spending in the last number of years.

● (1610)

At a time when our farm economy needs an immediate cash injection of anywhere from \$1 billion to \$2 billion so that farm families can survive, he provides nothing, not even the false comfort of another Liberal promise. He is simply continuing his shameful practice of shuffling farmers to the bottom of the pile. He does not even need to make promises. He is simply ignoring our farmers.

His broken promise on a dedicated fuel tax for infrastructure funding for municipalities will hurt many communities in my riding of Provencher and right across this country. When the Prime Minister was campaigning for leadership, among the \$34 billion of promises that he made he promised to share gas tax money with the municipalities. Since he assumed the mantle of leadership, he has not even raised the issue in a substantive way.

In Winnipeg he said that half of that fuel tax should go to municipalities. Now he says, "Let us negotiate". He was willing to give half of it. If he wants to negotiate the other half with the municipalities and the provinces to which those municipalities belong in a constitutional sense, he should now give that half and then deal with the other half later. He simply has no concrete plans to transfer gas taxes to the provinces and municipalities.

The GST rebate for municipalities is simply a drop in the bucket in terms of what is needed to sustain infrastructure. He takes in \$7 billion in gas tax revenues every year and this year he plans to give back \$580 million. That is like taking a dollar from a person's pocket and giving back eight cents. That is what it is all about.

The rebate to municipalities means that one of the largest municipalities in my riding, the city of Steinbach, may receive, depending on what it spends because this is a rebate, about \$100,000 in the next year. If the past funding practices of the government are any guide, that \$100,000 will be subtracted from the overall infrastructure programs in Manitoba, so that in the end, we will not even be getting the eight cents as new money, we will be getting absolutely nothing.

He takes a dollar away, gives back eight cents and then reduces the infrastructure programs accordingly. That is the name of the game. That is how municipalities in the province of Manitoba are being deprived of the ability to create the infrastructure that creates the wealth in this country. In the end, even the eight cent rebate, as I have stated, is lost.

Last, I would like to comment on recent developments of which we are all aware. The Prime Minister's throne speech statement said that he is marking "the start of a new government, a new agenda, a new way of thinking". This again is a cynical attempt to rewrite history.

It reminds me of the technique used in the Soviet Union when history was regularly rewritten and former prominent government officials disappeared from the books and disappeared even from the photographs. It would be like a picture of all the distinguished speakers and deputy speakers and suddenly your picture, Mr. Speaker, would simply disappear. We would all walk around saying that you were never there. That is what is happening. As our Prime Minister is attempting to rewrite history, he is dissociating himself from the government of which he was a key individual over the last 10 years.

All of the lofty promises in the Prime Minister's throne speech ring hollow when measured against the weight of the corruption that has characterized the sponsorship scandal that has digested his old friend, former ambassador and former cabinet colleague, Alfonso Gagliano, and which is now consuming his government. "Alfonso Gagliano?" the Prime Minister says, "I do not know the man. I was not even giving advice in Quebec when I was the finance minister, when I was an MP from Quebec. When I was in the cabinet, nobody asked me about Quebec. It was all this conspiracy of the 14 individuals".

● (1615)

It sounds a lot like the conspiracy of the 12 monkeys. One could never really find those 12 monkeys. Now we have a greater conspiracy. We have the 14 conspirators and they are the ones we should blame now. They are the ones we have to ferret out.

The Prime Minister claims that he knew nothing about the improper allocation of funds for the program. This stretches his credibility beyond what is palatable given that the Prime Minister himself has bragged about the amount of input he had into cabinet decisions over the past 10 years, given the fact that he was the vice-chair of the Treasury Board that reviewed the sponsorship program and given that he was the most powerful minister in a government and represented a riding in the province where the scandal arose.

I want to make one thing clear. This is not an issue about the people of Quebec. This is an issue about the corruption in the Liberal Party in Quebec. This has nothing to do with the people of Quebec. His government should be ashamed that his party has dragged that province into this scandal. He should be standing up and apologizing not only to the people of Canada but to the people of Quebec specifically.

In view of these facts, that he was the most powerful minister, that he bragged about his decisions and his influence, how can he say that he knew nothing? He says he knew nothing despite the fact that other caucus colleagues have publicly stated as late as yesterday that they raised concerns inside the Liberal caucus about the program as far back as 1999. The former heritage minister said he must have known, the inference being that everyone else did. Why did the then finance minister who is now the Prime Minister not know?

The Address

The truth is that the Prime Minister turned a blind eye while his Liberal friends stole tax dollars. Then Parliament was misled. How much was stolen we will never know. We know that \$250 million was wasted in this program. How much was stolen? Let us assume it is the moderate amount, relatively speaking, of a quarter of a billion dollars, maybe \$100 million, certainly much more than the couple of million dollars that the former prime minister thought might have been stolen and which was no big deal to him.

What does \$100 million mean? That could have paid for eight years of salary for 222 police officers. It could have paid for the annual salaries of 2,500 nurses. It could have paid for almost 100 MRI machines to be installed across Canada.

The Prime Minister's platitudes on fixing the democratic deficit cannot be taken seriously by even the most detached observer. It is a sad time for Canadian democracy. Nothing the Prime Minister could say could change the course of a government that has developed and nurtured a culture of corruption for over a decade.

• (1620)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the very comprehensive reply to the Speech from the Throne by my hon. colleague from Provencher. He raised a number of excellent points in his speech.

Dealing with the last point that he raised, I have been maintaining over the last couple of days that as more and more facts about the sponsorship scandal leak out, it is becoming increasingly clear to Canadians that where the Prime Minister is concerned, there is only one of two possibilities. Either he was completely and utterly incompetent in his job as finance minister in not knowing what was going on in his own government and in his own home province, or he had to be complicit, he had to have weighed his options and then elected to remain silent. It could only be one of those two things. Regardless of whether it is the fact that he was completely incompetent or that he was complicit, why would Canadians trust him to run the affairs of the country?

The other issue I want to raise is an exceedingly important issue that my colleague, the justice critic for the Conservative Party, raised during his remarks. It is the issue of the gun registry. He knows as I do that like his riding of Provencher, my riding of Prince George—Peace River has been vehemently, utterly and absolutely opposed to the criminal misuse of over \$1 billion since the gun registry's inception.

I wonder if he could comment and draw a comparison between a government that is trying to portray itself as a new government entering a new era, yet it has failed to bring forward a workable sexual predator registry at the same time as maintaining a huge drain on the public purse with the gun registry.

Mr. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River for that question. I had the opportunity to be in his riding a while ago and saw the hardworking cattle farmers, farmers and small townspeople who pay their taxes regularly. Sometimes they do not like it but they pay those taxes because it is our duty as Canadian citizens. We as parliamentarians in the government have an issue of trust that has now been breached. It is not just that government but it is in fact the people there.

Why trust the government? My learned friend says that it is either incompetent or it is complicit. If it is complicit it suggests that the Prime Minister has been involved in theft, and I cannot make that kind of suggestion in the House and I will not. Therefore I am left to say that it is utter incompetence and there is no reason to trust the Prime Minister and his gang of cabinet members.

The Liberals talk about the failure of the gun registry and say that it is something new. No, it is not. Small arms have been registered in Canada since 1934. This was not a new concept. It was a stupid concept but not a new one. They could have expanded the old one, as stupid an idea as that would have been, but this is not a new one. Again, this demonstrates incompetence.

Yet, in trying to apply the same principle, not to honest farmers, hunters and people who use a .22 rifle as a tool on the farm, they had no problem applying that to the innocent, but when it came to the criminally judged guilty sex offender, there was suddenly a constitutional problem. I remember the minister saying that we could not register convicted sexual offenders because there were issues of double jeopardy and issues of presumption of innocence—

An hon. member: Privacy concerns

Mr. Vic Toews:—privacy concerns, and they were all nonsense because the same government disregarded all those concerns in respect of the innocent and yet applied them to those who had already been found guilty. It is unheard of and simply not acceptable.

• (1625)

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, CPC): Mr. Speaker, implicit in what is in a background or the subtext of the whole Speech from the Throne, the Prime Minister is saying “vote for me because I have past experience, but then, by the way, don't associate me with my past 10 years when I was Mr. Chrétien's most influential cabinet minister”. He cannot have it both ways, but that is the subtext of so many of the points that are made in the throne speech. I would like the member to comment on that.

I would also like him to perhaps allude to a number of the things that we positively oppose. We can point out the inadequacies of the throne speech and its generalization of where it is going to go but we do not oppose for opposing's sake. We have a positive agenda, a very positive alternative, a belief in Canadians that we can do better than what I call these lousy Liberals, to have an alliteration there.

I would like the member's comments on two points: the double-mindedness of the Prime Minister's intent about saying “vote for me but then I have to divide myself from myself”; and then the positive things that we propose as a constructive alternative.

The Address

Mr. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from New Westminster for bringing that question here to the House and to my attention.

Yes, it has puzzled me how the now Prime Minister was able to take credit for what he saw as the best aspects of the Chrétien government and yet has refused to associate himself with those issues in which he was most closely involved as a Quebec minister, as a vice-president of the Treasury Board and as the finance minister.

We look at the HRDC boondoggle; billions of dollars. He was the eye of the needle, as the new finance minister says, through which all spending went. We did not just have the camel going through this eye of the needle. We had the whole caravan going through, and the finance minister, who is now the Prime Minister, saw nothing. How does one fit billions of dollars through that eye of the needle and never figure out that money is disappearing at an alarming rate?

It is the same with the gun registry. Here he is, the eye of the needle, and it is just pouring through there.

What he has demonstrated consistently is that for those programs, for which his government has been most proud, he was in charge of the money and the money disappeared. He was able to do that when he avoided the House for the last year, when he was off on his Liberal leadership campaign.

Now we see the results of trying to live on both sides of that coin. Every day there is another news conference trying to explain why things are not quite the way he explained them the day before.

I want to point out that as a new Conservative Party we have not simply come out of thin air. We draw on a rich history of democratic reform that comes from the old Reform Party and the Alliance Party. We come from a rich tradition of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada. We looked at the policies and brought those policies together in one party. We have now put together a fairly extensive policy book that will be worked on as the leadership campaign goes forward and we will present to the people of Canada the real alternative to the corrupt, tired Liberal regime.

• (1630)

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the last number of years the agriculture industry in the west has been in a crisis situation. This has been aggravated greatly by the BSE problem. I am not comforted by what I see in the throne speech as it relates to agriculture, and representing the west, I was wondering how the member feels about it.

Mr. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from Newfoundland. We have a member from New Westminster and Newfoundland, and we have every one of these members in a new Conservative Party, from east to west.

As I indicated earlier in my response, the Prime Minister said nothing about agriculture. He did not even have to make any promises in terms of agriculture. His actions have already spoken louder than any words or promises could ever have spoken. He has slashed agricultural funding as a total percentage of the budget from 2.8% in 1993 to 1.4% today.

Many farmers are telling me that the programs the Liberal government brought forward to help farmers have not made their

way to the farm gate. The Conservative Party has told the Liberals over and over again that the programs were not getting there. Now the farmers in my riding are coming to me and saying that within a couple of months that will be the end.

Where are the promises? Where is the commitment from the government to treat farmers across the country equitably?

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my first observation on the Speech from the Throne, which is what we are debating today, is that it contains a lot of words. It reminds me of the opening line in Joseph Conrad's novel *Under Western Eyes*, when he says "Words...are the...foes of reality".

Those are sobering words for us here in the Chamber because a lot of words come out of this Chamber. In fact, if the words are not backed with appropriate action, then the words that are uttered here actually become the foe of reality.

I listened carefully to the Speech from the Throne and I read the document. As I was listening in the august corridors outside the Senate chamber, it first struck me that whoever wrote it, although we understand that it has to be ascribed to and responsibility goes to the Prime Minister and the government, but those who joined together to write it had, what appeared to me, an utter disregard for the constitutional jurisdictions upon which this country should run.

Mr. Speaker, you have heard a lot of responses to Speeches from the Throne and responses to things that the government has done. When the Speech from the Throne was read, I listened carefully, took some notes and read the document, and only then did I respond to various media outlets that wanted a response, as they do from all members of the opposition.

I went out on a limb. I knew what it was like, having been in government at the provincial level, to produce a document, maybe a speech from the throne or maybe a budget, and then having to listen to opposition members dismiss the entire work as having nothing of value or believing the whole thing was a farce.

I thought to myself at those times that if I ever became a member of an opposition party, and I guess one must be careful what they wish for, although I certainly did not wish for it, that I would try to find something positive to say about what the government does with a particular piece of legislation, a document, a speech from the throne or a budget.

I therefore did look through this Speech from the Throne and found some things in it that I felt I could fairly comment on to the media, some positive things that were said, some positive direction. At some risk to my colleagues here who might get upset with me, I will admit that I publicly declared that I had found some positive things in the Speech from the Throne. My remarks were published in some national and local media. However when we say those things we become accountable and our constituents look to us to take some kind of responsibility for the things we have said.

The Address

However, one of the first items out of the four or five items that I found in the Speech from the Throne that I thought was positive was totally contradicted within 24 hours by the Prime Minister. I had gone to bat for him. I had named an item in the throne speech that was a good thing and said that we should give credit to the Prime Minister for it. I stuck my chin out for him. I have not received a thank you card yet, but I did stick my chin out for him. Within 24 hours and certainly in the days following, one after another, those positive elements that I saw in the Speech from the Throne began to come crashing down around us.

The first reflection I would like to make is related to the utter disregard or misunderstanding of why we have a Constitution and why we have this separation of powers and duties in the Constitution. This is very important. Constitutional jurisdictions are boring for people to listen to but they have a huge impact on our lives.

I would encourage the seven or eight people across the country who usually tune in to what is going on in the Chamber at this time in the afternoon not to leave us now just because we are talking about constitutional jurisdiction. It is very important.

• (1635)

In the Speech from the Throne, the Prime Minister invaded countless areas of provincial jurisdiction. That means there will be federal government programming going into provincial areas of jurisdiction. If the government has the money to do things in provincial areas of jurisdiction, there is a constitutional process that it could follow.

It is in the Constitution that the government can, through a series of transfers, transfer money to the provinces, as the federal government should, and as it should do more often than it does. It should transfer the funds, but transfer them without the programs, without the incumbent bureaucracy, without the redundancy, and without the lack of efficiency that would erode the programs. And, ironically, without robbing the people in the provinces who desperately need those funds because they have been deflected through a series of federal programs. Instead of the money just going straight to the provinces, to those areas of need, the government is cutting through the constitutional transfer process.

[*Translation*]

My friends from Quebec, the citizens of la belle province, have known for a long time why the government is bent on interfering in provincial jurisdictions. My constituents do not always understand why Quebecers are sometimes not pleased with the federal government. It is because, most of the time, the government does not understand the Constitution and does not respect provincial jurisdictions.

[*English*]

It creates the problem through its lack of understanding and through its wilful intervention into provincial areas.

There was a court ruling in Quebec only a few days ago which ruled as unconstitutional the provision of a federal program into Quebec in a provincial area of jurisdiction. I happen to believe that the court was right. The government is creating huge problems and

creating a giant waste, and a depletion of resources badly needed by people in the provinces.

There is another area of concern when the government invades provincial areas of jurisdiction. When our framework of democracy was set up, a framework was developed. There was an understanding coming from some of the initial thinkers in this area in the 1500s and 1600s in Great Britain, and later on in France and in the colonies which later became the United States. In all of these jurisdictions there was a distinct and a proper distrust for individuals as they became imbued with power. They knew, and we should know, if we give somebody power we must put in place a balance to that power or the power will first invade their hearts and then start to effect their heads.

That is why there are distinct separations of power in what we call the British parliamentary model under which we operate. There is a legislative area of jurisdiction. It is the House or the legislatures in the provinces. There is an executive. There has to be a government, a cabinet that makes the decisions. There has to be a judiciary which is also separate. It is designed purposely to balance off these areas of power which, if unbalanced, can go to a person's head and democracy could turn authoritarian. The Prime Minister has neglected, ignored or not understood the importance of these separations of power.

I was looking forward to one of the areas the Prime Minister was suggesting to put in check and that is the area of the courts, especially the Supreme Court. The courts wade into areas in which they should not. He understood that. Part of this division of powers is that elected people must be accountable for the decisions they make.

The public needs the opportunity to look at the laws we make and if it does not like the laws then it can throw us out and bring in people who will either make good laws or repeal bad ones. However, the Supreme Court, which should be independent and which should not be interfered with politically, has an increasing tendency—and this is not just a Canadian phenomenon, we know it is international—to wade into areas in which members of Parliament or members of legislatures should be the ones accountable.

It would do us well to go back to the words of Montesquieu who said “Again, there is no liberty, if the power of judging be not separated from the legislative and executive powers”.

The courts should judge on the law and the intent with which it was written. Members of Parliament should be responsible for the laws. When we start to allow that transfer of power, it is just as dangerous as allowing a legislature or the House of Commons to be sitting in a court of judgment and telling people they are guilty or not and sending them off to jail. We would not want that to happen. We could think of some people spoken about today who maybe should be headed to that place, but that is a dangerous power to give to elected people. I am not talking about the legislature invading the area of the judiciary; however, the judiciary has gone too far in too many cases.

The Address

A few years ago, an honourable and esteemed judge made this comment to his colleagues on the various benches across the country. He said that if judges want to make laws they should step down from their bench and run for office. He said judges were privateering on the sea lanes of democracy.

We would do well to listen to the words of the English Parliament of 1641 regarding the King's Court of Star Chamber, as it was called. That is where the term comes from. It is an ominous term today. Any star chamber reference has sent shivers up our collective spines, and so it should. It actually came in 1641. The Parliament of the day was fed up with the King's Court of Star Chamber continually invading legislative areas. It passed a statute and closed it down.

● (1640)

The statutes stated:

—but the said Judges have not kept themselves to the points limited by the said statute, but have undertaken to punish where no law doth warrant, and to make decrees for things having no such authority—

They finally had to take things into their own hands.

We have that ability in our Constitution. We have the ability to respectfully say to the court, without drawing our swords, “Notwithstanding what has been said, honourable judges, we are not going to do that.” That covers a variety of areas, not all areas, but it covers a variety of areas.

We have the ability to have a respectful dialogue, and that is what the chief justice has called it. The notwithstanding clause is a dialogue. It has somehow taken on this air of being thermonuclear, “Oh, do not touch the notwithstanding clause. My goodness, it would be devastating to anything that we value as good or right.” No, it was put there very clearly and very specifically.

It is something that could be used if people had the desire to do it, for instance, on the question of marriage. The question of marriage should not be defined or redefined by three judges in a provincial Ontario court, as happened last year. If it is to be changed, it should be done here in this chamber. Members of Parliament, accountable to the people, should change a definition which happens to predate government, churches and synagogues. It was wrong for the courts to stray into that area.

In the Speech from the Throne the Prime Minister said he was going to put some kind of check in place by taking our idea, from this side of the House, of vetting people who want to go to the bench. We would vet them in some kind of public way, not a shredding process as we see in the United States, but through a process where we would have an indication if a hopeful judge would be an activist or was going to take a proper view of ruling based on how the laws were written.

Within days or even hours after the Speech from the Throne, the Prime Minister was already backing away from that commitment. It became more difficult to support the things that the Prime Minister had been saying. He will get away from the question of marriage by avoiding it during an election by coming up with what he thinks might be all right. Before we even get to debate it here, he tosses it to the Supreme Court. It is turning the democratic process on its head.

MPs should stand and speak up for whatever their view of marriage or whatever the issue is. They should be accountable to their electorate. If people want to take a law to the Supreme Court because they think it has violated the Constitution, then so be it.

This will continue and exacerbate a process. What will happen? Will it be that for everything we want to do here? Will we have to write a reference and fire it off to a group of non-elected people first? I do not think that is appropriate. The Prime Minister backed away. I was congratulating him and he backed away, and he did it quickly.

The Prime Minister said he would allow MPs to vote freely in the House of Commons. I spoke with a number of media representatives after he said that in the Speech from the Throne. I was quoted publicly as saying that it was a good thing and I supported the Prime Minister for that. Allowing MPs to vote freely is basic and academic, but it has rarely happened in the House.

The next day, within 24 hours of the Speech from the Throne, the Prime Minister backed away. He said his MPs would not be allowed to vote freely on this disastrous issue of the billion dollar failure of the gun registry. Whatever people feel about the gun registry, there was a commitment that we would be able to debate it freely in the House of Commons. We, as the official opposition, clearly said that we would not view this as a confidence motion. We were very clear about that.

However, he used that excuse. He browbeat his MPs. The brand new Prime Minister, looking to set a fresh record on the democratic deficit, browbeat his own MPs into saying that they would lose the government if this went down.

No, they would not. We would not make it a confidence vote. All they would lose is a sinkhole of another billion dollars which is a disaster for this country. He backed away from that one.

The Prime Minister had an opportunity, when he talked about democratic deficit, to look at the Senate. He does not have to go to the Constitution. He continues to use that as an excuse. We have one province where 500,000 people—10 times almost more than ever voted for the Prime Minister—elected a person to be in the Senate and the Prime Minister says no. When an opening comes up for Alberta in the Senate, he will not put an elected person there. This would not require any constitutional change. All he would have to do is respect democracy. He says that he will not respect democracy.

My colleague who spoke before me already referred to the promise. We had a vote in the House to let a bigger portion of the GST and the federal taxes that we pump into our tanks and vehicles every day come home to the taxpayers that sent it there.

The Address

•(1645)

He made a commitment to do that. Now we find out how hollow it is. At one point, as my colleague pointed out, half of that money used to come back to the needs of municipalities and perhaps now 8¢ on every dollar and along with it a whole mess of federal programming. There will be federal brass plaques to present. There will be big documents and other layers of bureaucracy set up. The money that is so badly needed for infrastructure by our growing municipalities will not come. I had to retract another area where I said that is a good thing and I gave him credit for doing it.

When a government focuses on areas which it should not even be focusing on, which are none of its business, it loses its ability to focus on the main areas, such as national defence. People ask why does the government not get involved in national defence and properly fund our armed forces. Because it is focused on too many other things, too much minutia that does not even belong to it in the Constitution.

Why has the government not negotiated with any kind of strength on the softwood lumber deal? International treaties are the purview of the federal government, but it is so scattered on running around trying to invade other areas to buy quick votes with its plaques and its pictures in areas of provincial jurisdiction that it neglects and does not have the dynamic force, the intellectual force or the moral force to really involve itself in the area where it should be, such as international treaties. The softwood lumber file has been a disaster. Communities in my constituency, Merritt, Keremeos and in Princeton still have not received the community funding that was promised by the federal government to help them absorb the impact of its own failed negotiations.

Area after area that the federal government should be involved in it abandons. The areas that it should not be involved in it gets into and we continue to lose out.

Our foreign affairs policy continues to be deficient. This country does not have a foreign affairs policy which simply states that our government will support democracies and stand against and resist dictatorships. We see that acted out all the time. Our government, whether it is giving strong statements in support of Taiwan, when 400 missiles in mainland communist China are lined up on the border aimed at Taiwan right now and why? Because it wants to have a referendum and our government will not speak about that.

When the foreign affairs minister from Taiwan wants to visit here, we will not even let him in the country, but when the mainland Chinese communist minister of defence wants to come to the country the government lets him in, and we should let him. We should have dialogue. When the foreign affairs minister of the democratic jurisdiction of Taiwan wants to come here, we send him home. It is all upside down because the government is not focused on the things it should be focused on.

The government is too involved in the minutia. With the money that it says it has that is surplus for all these federal programs and the intrusions into provincial affairs, we could use that transfer of money into our area.

In Westbank in my constituency a bridge needs to be built. There is a commitment to do that but we need sufficient federal funds. We

still have not seen the funds come home. He starts the Speech from the Throne with this, but we have not seen the funds to repair the devastation of the forest fires that happened. I have a sneaking suspicion that just before the election we are going to see the big Liberal trucks rolling into town with dollar bills, plaques and pictures of federal ministers. Our people need the funds now.

Health care institutions and post-secondary institutions, yes, they all need money. Transfer the funds but get the federal programming out of it. Get rid of the redundancy. Get rid of that.

As I close my remarks I want to comment on the billion dollar sponsorship scandal. For a number of years I sat around tables with finance ministers and with the Prime Minister when he was a finance minister. He knew in great detail the money he was taking out of provincial programs, but the money that he shovelled into this federal program he says of which he knows not.

I cannot support the initiatives in the Speech from the Throne as I did at the outset, gamely, bravely and giving the Prime Minister the benefit of the doubt. He has now proven me and all Canadians wrong by backing away from almost every commitment he has made in the Speech from the Throne. We need a government that will not back away from its commitments.

•(1650)

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just very briefly, let me say that I appreciate the member's statements regarding the power of judges and the power of the legislative arm of government: that they need to be separate and apart.

I also noted the comments about the charter of rights and our Constitution. Liberals always say that the charter protects minorities. The charter does not protect minorities. What the charter protects are principles. Whether a majority ascribes to them or a minority ascribes to them, it protects principles. My concern is that the court has stopped using a principle based approach and simply goes to a minority based approach, which is an unconstitutional way of proceeding.

Specifically to my question, on the democratic reform proposals, I notice in the Speech from the Throne that these proposals really came from the old Reform Party. I am just wondering whether my colleague found the same kinds of similarities between that sort of democratic reform brought forward by that old Reform Party, and I say that never having been a member of the Reform Party.

•(1655)

Mr. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, in his usual incisive and astute manner, the hon. member has brought forward some interesting items here.

The Address

I too was not a member of the Reform Party, nor was I a founding member during its formative and growing years through the late 1980s and into the 1990s. I was a member of provincial government, as was my colleague. I was in fact a Conservative, a Progressive Conservative as it was called. I did note that these were elements not just of the Reform Party. Certainly the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta at the time, under Premier Lougheed, was looking at a number of these items. As a matter of fact, in British Columbia as far back as 1984—an ominous date, I know—and then moving through 1985 and 1986, people like the then Premier Bennett at the time were talking about a reformed Senate. He called it a Triple-E Senate.

These notions, which thankfully the Reform Party of that day coalesced into some clear, principled, articulated stands, came from a variety of people, individuals and groups who understood what democracy was all about. Reform of the Senate came from a number of different places, but it clearly was a part of the plan. And free votes for MPs, my goodness, that is so basic to what citizens ask for and expect.

This is what happens. As we know, the federal government has a great tendency to poll. The Liberals poll almost nightly, depending on the issue. What the government does is watch the opposition proposals. The Liberals do not like them because they go against what their view of a small-l liberal is; theirs is a highly centralized authoritarian form of government with one person at the top cracking the whip on everyone else. They do not like our notions of individual democracy and individual rights, but they carefully poll on these items. If they see our suggestions getting some lift or getting legs, they will watch for a while. When a particular item is getting legs, they say, “Let us to try to weave it into our program. Or we will say we are going to do it and that will take the pressure off the public to think of voting for the opposition. We will just kind of look like we are doing it and then after the election we will not”.

We have done a very close analysis of the red book promises. Over 68% of them, year after year, are not fulfilled. The hon. member will recall that just before the election in 2000, one thing that was polling, among a number of things, with the popularity of our new party was our tax proposals. So right before the election, two days before, as a matter of fact—I give the Liberals full credit for their strategic impulse—they stole a couple of those planks.

So it is that there is a demand from the public for members of Parliament to speak freely. I am not blaming senators. We know most of the senators. They are actually good people, but they are good people trapped in a bad system. More people are saying to reform that chamber. They are saying that the money is wasted and the senators are unelected and unaccountable. They are saying to reform it.

In all these areas, we could reduce the democratic deficit and put more democracy back into the local area. Democracy is safest in our local areas. It becomes more dangerous when it becomes centralized. In all of these areas now, the federal Liberals are polling. They see which ones are resonating and say they will take them. They will give something a head nod of assent and after the election they will forget about it because they do not like sharing democracy with the rest of the world or the rest of the country.

That is the process. I am glad the hon. member raised that point.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member just mentioned free votes. Of course one of the big planks in the Speech from the Throne and undoubtedly one of the planks the government will try to use as we head into an election and talk about the democratic deficit is free votes. Free votes should be the central part of any dealings with improving the situation in the House, but then we find that the party opposite, the governing party, is being told that there will not be a free vote on the funding for the gun registry. I wonder what the member thinks of that.

Mr. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, again another astute observation, and I congratulate the member.

This is such a basic question. Obviously our concern related to the gun registry is quite simple: it just does not work. It simply does not work. Crime with firearms is going up, especially in a couple of our urban centres, which is very distressing.

We are for gun safety. We want to promote those gun safety courses that are out there, and most people take them.

The handgun registry has been in place since 1938. We are not saying we should get rid of that. The federal Liberals have an ongoing tendency from which they cannot shake themselves and that is to always put more emphasis on the rights of those who break the law than on the rights of those who keep the law. Canadians are getting fed up with that, such as the parole system where serious, repeat, violent offenders demand and get their right to automatic parole before their sentence is up.

This has to do with the gun registry. In just that area alone in the last 25 years, 480 innocent Canadians have been murdered by parolees out on parole: 480. It does not make sense. There is no commitment to change that system just as there is no commitment to change the gun registry system. It is indicative of how the Prime Minister is going to be acting as a Prime Minister, because he made certain comments.

The polls are being done nightly and they say that this thing the opposition is saying about the gun registry is resonating with people, it is a waste of money, it is \$1 billion, and the government said it would be a revenue generator. Not five or six years ago, the government said it was going to generate revenue. Then it was \$1 million short and then it was \$2 million. The Prime Minister, who was the finance minister then, presided over that whole disaster and never blew the whistle once. Then, when it has come to such a head and there is a firestorm about this right across the country because \$1 billion could pay for a lot of nurses, doctors or police officers, the Prime Minister says there will be a free vote allowed on the gun registry. MPs will be allowed to vote freely.

The Address

Something happened in the 24 hours from the time he said that in the Speech from the Throne. Who got to him? What pollster ran up to him with a skewed poll and said, “Never mind what is right or wrong, look at this poll, Mr. Prime Minister”? He flipped, he flopped and he dropped that whole commitment.

It is a false notion for him to say he has whipped his brand new MPs into shape, the MPs who boldly stood him by through the tough times, because the government will fall if they vote for a change, for more money for the \$1 billion sinkhole. That is what it is. People watching or listening should realize that this is not even about repealing the law. The Liberals want more money for the disaster.

He said no, that he was not going to let MPs vote on it freely because the government would fall, when there was a commitment from all of the opposition benches. We have said no, it is not a confidence vote. It is a common sense vote. He said too bad and has whipped his MPs into shape. I hope some of them are thinking about their commitment to support him when he has so quickly turned against such a clear promise that he made not days ago.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Repentigny.

In my life, I have had the opportunity to experience, hear, debate and criticize a number of throne speeches. In Quebec City, I seized each opportunity to speak because it was a golden opportunity to talk about the problems in my riding, the contents of the throne speech and what it was lacking.

I must admit that, in Quebec City, the throne speech was delivered by a premier I really admired. He had so many plans and ideas for Quebec's future that the throne speech debate could have lasted a long time. The throne speech was not short on content. Mr. Lévesque was recognized as being a good writer who had something to say. His throne speeches were rich in substance.

I also had the opportunity to work with the late Claude Ryan, whose funeral will be held tomorrow. Claude Ryan was not a member of my party, but I must recognize that, in the Quebec Parliament, while he was there and I got to work with him, I saw that he made a positive contribution. His speeches were always well thought out. I enjoyed working and discussing things with him, even if I disagreed with his ideas.

I also want to take this opportunity—surely the Chair will not object—to express my condolences to his family, who is now mourning their loss.

I was terribly disappointed by this throne speech. First of all, because it makes a fundamental oversight. There is absolutely no mention of seniors. This is disappointing and scandalous. If we live in a country that we love and want to develop, be it Quebec or Canada, if we can express ourselves today, it is because others went before us and worked hard. They deserve not only our respect but also maximum benefits during their old age, or at least the benefits they are entitled to.

Since I arrived in the House, I have worked on matters relating to seniors, including the guaranteed income supplement. A terrible and

unpardonable injustice has been done here. I met at least 3,000 people who work with seniors' associations. I met 15,000 seniors and held a total of 37 meetings in all the regions. Everyone condemned the fact that seniors had not been treated fairly enough.

Even the government recognized it, because it did improve things. So, as a result, over the past year, there are probably some 25,000 people in Quebec out of 68,000 who have started receiving the guaranteed income supplement to which they were entitled but which they did not receive before. Thus, some work has been done. Still, there are many people who have not been found. Even among the ones who have been found, some have truly been robbed. There are people who are owed money.

Two weeks ago, I was in the parish of Notre-Dame-des-Anges-de-Montauban, in my riding. A couple wanted to speak to me. Both were 70 years old.

• (1705)

They said to me, “Thank you. You came to give a talk and you opened our eyes. Ever since, we have \$4,000 more each year; \$2,000 for each of us”.

“Monsieur Éthier, how old are you?”, I asked, and he answered, “We are both 70”. I asked further, “Have you been getting the supplement since you turned 65?” “No,” he replied, “this is the first time we have got it, and they told us we were only entitled to 11 months of retroactivity”.

That is outrageous. These people, this couple, were entitled to \$4,000. This is \$20,000 over five years. I have met people like that all over Quebec. These are people who were eligible, but, for various reasons, had not received any money, and no one had made an effort to give it to them. These are people who, for various reasons, were unaware. About 14% of seniors eligible for the guaranteed income supplement are not receiving it.

In all of Canada, that means some 270,000 people. I would have thought that in his throne speech, the new Prime Minister would have talked about these people and righted the injustice that has been done to them, but no. Every time we talk about it, they tell us that the retroactive period is only 11 months. But listen carefully to me.

This same Prime Minister, who was finance minister and owner of Canada Steamship Lines, among others, had legislation passed in 1997 or 1998 retroactive to 1995 so that he could pocket \$100 million, money he could have paid in taxes to the government if he had not conducted his business with a tax haven in Barbados. He managed, in a roundabout way, to get \$100 million to put in his pockets.

The Address

With the \$100 million he pocketed, based on an average of \$4,000 a year—for seniors who were denied the guaranteed income supplement, which ranges between \$1 and \$6,000, the average being \$4,000 a year—25,000 seniors could have received the guaranteed income supplement. With the \$100 million he pocketed, every senior in Quebec whom we could find could have enjoyed 24 months of retroactivity instead of 11 months.

However, retroactive legislation was possible for him. This is something I personally will never be able to accept. Rest assured, the general public does not accept this either. In my view, this scandal is almost as bad as the sponsorship scandal, which has been the talk of the town all week.

I am disappointed to see that, in this Parliament, in this government, people have such bad memories. There are people who see things happening, but yet it seems that they have heard nothing, seen nothing. For example, the Prime Minister told us today, in connection with the Barbados business, that he fought against it. He fought against it, yet got \$100 million out of it.

Why could there not have been something in the inaugural speech about restoring justice to older Canadians? Why was there nothing? I find this unbelievable. I will not have time to talk about the sponsorship scandal, although much is being said about that these days.

It seems that the same man who was able to make retroactive legislation back in 1997 in order to line his own pockets had no idea there was any scandal going on, that a bunch of Liberals were lining their pockets through the sponsorship program. The amount involved is around a half million dollars. Approximately \$100 million went into the waiting pockets of a lot of little Liberal friends who were buddy-buddy with those in power.

Now it would appear that the same Prime Minister, who used to be finance minister, who used to be Treasury Board vice-president, did not know. He signed the cheques, gave out the money, but did not know there was anything dishonest going on. So there is another \$100 million that could ensure that those seniors I referred to before receive 36 months of retroactive payments instead of 24 on the money they are owed.

• (1710)

This is why we are disappointed in this government. There is nothing in the throne speech to improve the situation.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to congratulate my colleague, the hon. member for Champlain, our critic for seniors' issues, who has done great work. It is quite an undertaking to go all around Quebec trying to make people understand that they are losing money. The government did not help us; this is a victory by the Bloc Québécois. Yes, we have made some progress. I congratulate the hon. member for Champlain because the system has been improved, as has the form that was extremely complex for those who tried to fill it in.

Nevertheless, only 25,000 seniors out of 68,000 in Quebec have been located. I would like my hon. friend to explain why we could not track down the others. It is not easy. The government tells us we are in the era of computers and electronics, but it is not easy for

seniors to understand everything, with the Internet and all that. It is up to the government to adjust to the level of the public and not vice versa.

I would like my colleague to explain how difficult it is for seniors to get what they deserve, to try to obtain the guaranteed income supplement, and how we can act together to do something so that seniors will get what is owed them.

• (1715)

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. In fact, it is difficult.

As I said earlier, from travelling around Quebec and meeting people, we realized that, often, the people who do not apply for it are, for one reason or another, unable to fill out the form. For example, I met a person who lived alone. This individual had had several strokes and suffered some memory loss but was in good health. Even if we are helping makes things easier, it is still hard for this person, who lives alone, to get the benefits owed. It was hard to make them understand that they were entitled to this money. Other people have to take on this responsibility.

During this tour, someone said, "You still do not want to go door to door". I answered yes, that is one possibility. There are enough organizations taking care of seniors that we could, in fact, ask a seniors' club to do this. If we wanted to give them their money, we could. The system has to become more human.

It is true that the sick and the disabled, for one reason or another, have trouble communicating with the government by Internet or otherwise to get what they are entitled to; there is a way to make the system more human. We managed to do this to a certain extent over the past year, but more needs to be done.

We could if the will was there, as much will as it takes to pocket \$100 million while one is finance minister by finding a way to make legislation retroactive. Throughout Quebec, I met people prepared to help us, who are already helping us to track down people entitled to these benefits.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues, I too am pleased to speak in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

It is a bit awkward to talk about nothing, about a vacuum, about empty air. So I will read a few excerpts from the throne speech if I may. I will then offer very humbly a speech that might inspire the PM or the government, or another leader for a speech just as empty of meaning as this one. Then, having acknowledged the vacuum left by this speech, they may make an effort in future, out of respect for parliamentarians and the people of Canada, to have something with a bit more consistency to it.

I will give some concrete examples. I am not joking and I did not get this from the *Readers' Digest* humour section. I will read for example a most edifying paragraph from page 2

We want governments to reflect our values in the actions they take. This includes living within our means; investing as we can afford; and looking to the future.

The Address

You will see that a class of philosophy or literature students could spend a long time pondering the underlying meaning of this statement without coming up with any answer.

Later on, on page 3, we read:

We want a strong economy for the 21st century, with well-paying and meaningful work; ready at the forefront of the next big technological revolution; and built on a solid fiscal foundation.

They could have gone on to mention motherhood and apple pie. Then:

It is time to take our place, meet our responsibilities, carry our weight.

They go on to say:

Today the Government is proposing an ambitious agenda to set our country on this path. An agenda that should be measured and judged by the goals we have set and by the resolve and constancy by which they are pursued.

If we pay a little attention to the throne speech, we begin to notice that it may contain some pretty phrases, but their meaning is pretty vague. Here is one that is a bit less so.

The path to achievement begins with making sure that Canadians believe their government, so that they can believe in government.

That is on page 3, but I would remind hon. members that there has been another Auditor General report this week. Let me repeat:

The path to achievement begins with making sure that Canadians believe their government, so that they can believe in government.

Allow me to read an excerpt from the Auditor General's report, page 20. We live in a civilized country. The problem is that the sponsorship scandal even affects the police in this country. We are at a point where the government has been corrupted by laundered money. The police being asked to conduct an investigation into this corruption are involved in the scandal. Imagine. Yet, we were told a few weeks ago that we must act in such a way that would allow Canadians to trust in their government.

Listen to this. It is not sovereignists, but the Auditor General, who said about a \$1.7 million grant for the 125th anniversary of the RCMP:

A separate non-government bank account was used for all deposits and payments to the RCMP's Quebec Division; this was a contravention of the Financial Administration Act. The internal audit report mentioned that the Receiver General account was not used and approval was not obtained for a departmental bank account—a requirement under Treasury Board policy.

I think the Treasury Board policy was probably put on ice. A billion dollars was lost on the firearms registry and the Treasury Board president did not notice. Two planes were purchased for \$100 million and the Treasury Board president did not notice. Some \$250 million was spent on sponsorships and the Treasury Board president did not notice. But never mind.

In addition, all transactions for Quebec Division were recorded in a manual accounting system rather than in the RCMP's corporate accounting system.

Séraphin also worked it out by hand.

We were unable to verify the transactions from the Quebec bank account—

Why?

—because some of the supporting documents had been destroyed.

The RCMP destroyed documents for an illegal bank account that used a manual accounting system.

The Speech from the Throne says:

The path to achievement begins with making sure that Canadians believe in their government—

Keep it up and we will believe in it.

Further in the Auditor General's report, it says:

The RCMP used some of the sponsorship funds it received for its own operations... for the 125th anniversary celebrations, and six horses and two trailers were purchased for \$107,268.

● (1720)

With the money that was transferred for sponsorships and publicity, they bought six horses. They must be Canadian horses on which the flag of the former heritage minister has been stamped.

And further:

[the RCMP] agrees that the Financial Administration Act was contravened—

By the police. However, it says:

—the RCMP's own administrative review concluded that this was due to a lack of understanding by local managers and not malicious intent.

It is certain that there was a lack of understanding; they are usually involved in legal activities. This time, it was not legal. They did not understand and therefore were caught. Canadians must believe in their government.

The throne speech is like that all the way through. I shall offer the House another speech and give the author's name at the end. I hope I will have time to read it all. Here it is:

We are at a turning point in our collective existence when, more than ever before, democracy must speak. It must speak out loud and clear so that its voice is heard by all those to whom it carries, so that no one can be oblivious of the deeper meaning or deny the objective reality.

In short, the time has come to act. To believe. To dare. To move. To do something. To overcome the obstacles that await us in our path toward prosperity. The time has come to outdo ourselves. Our destiny is calling. Will we answer "Present"? Will we snatch the golden ring and take this opportunity that will never come again until the next time? The answer is obvious.

You can see that is just as deep as the throne speech. In the article I am quoting, it says "Quebec", but we can change that to "Canada":

[Canada] is a complex society, ever changing, even restructuring, and we will never solve problems by running away from the solutions. But [Canada] is also a mature, modern, open society that cherishes its identity and cultivates its distinct character, a society that has confidence in itself—

This is irony here. I would not want anyone to think seriously that these remarks are mine.

—to turn towards new horizons. This is the [Canada], with the true values and concerns to which we can all identify, that I invite to fully play its role and face the issues that confront us.

This is as serious as the throne speech.

In order to achieve that, we need specific objectives and promising, unifying and structuring projects based on reality. We must also decide, unequivocally and while fully realizing the work and sacrifices involved, the type of world in which we want to live. There are many ways to play, but there is only one way to win. And we will win, because there is no other alternative for those who want to succeed. And we want to succeed.

Dear friends, I have a plan.

Better still, I have a vision.

That vision is an ambitious desire to give ourselves the tools to build. To fulfill together our legitimate aspirations, to affirm our vitality and to strengthen our ideals. To perform also, to the full extent of our abilities, by relying on our energy and on our tremendous resourcefulness.—

And, at this critical turning point for our common future, we would put our affairs in the hands of these denigrating and narrow-minded souls who are out of touch with the reality, these people who hinder growth and who keep us from developing at our pace? No, my dear friends, never. We have better things to do; we deserve better than that.

And I will tell you what we deserve: we deserve to be, in every respect, who we are, who we have always been, who we will always be, and who we are proud to be, without any ulterior motive and without envying anyone. This is the [Canada] to which we must aspire, this is the [country] where I want to take you and where I want your children, my children and the children of your children and of my children to fulfill themselves totally and lastingly. I want a [Canada] where life is good, a [Canada] that meets our expectations.

So, the time has come to reinvent ourselves without repudiating our traditions, to give ourselves new momentum while preserving our gains, to make things differently without knocking everything around. Of course, everyone will have to work at this. Concerted efforts and an ironclad solidarity will be necessary. Such is the price of the consensus building process—

I will leave the nice rhetoric and the empty words to others: the public is intelligent enough to put things in perspective. And I bet that, ultimately, it will endorse the ideas that I am putting forward. It will use its past experience with today's ideas to build a better tomorrow.

Together, we can do it.

This ironical article was written by Jean Dion. It sort of looks like the throne speech. It is one thing to be ironical, but the public deserves better than to be made fun of with a meaningless speech.

In quoting this article, I wanted to send to the Liberals the message that trust is something that is earned.

• (1725)

[English]

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the throne speech was very inadequate.

Some of the things I would have wanted to appear on the positive side are visions. Among these are the freedom of Canadians to pursue their enlightened and ethical self-interests within a competitive economy; the freedom of individual Canadians to enjoy the fruits of their labour to the greatest possible extent, and the right to own property.

I would want to see a belief that a responsible government should be fiscally prudent and should avoid programs which cannot be discharged reasonably by the individual or others; a belief that it is the responsibility of individuals to provide for themselves, their families and their dependants, while recognizing that government must lift and affirm those who require assistance; a belief that the purpose of Canada as a nation state, guided by reflective and prudent leadership, is to create a climate where individual initiative is rewarded, excellence is pursued, security and privacy of the individual are provided, and where prosperity is developed by a free and competitive market economy.

I would also want to see a belief that the quality of the environment is a vital part of our heritage and existence to be protected by each generation for the next; a belief that Canada should accept its obligations among the nations of the world and be an international leader for basic freedoms; and a belief that good and responsible government is attentive and accountable to the people it represents and has representatives who conduct themselves in an ethical manner and display integrity, honesty and a concern for the public best interest.

Private Members' Business

Those are just some of the things I would have wanted to see in the Speech from the Throne.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca advised me in writing that he would be unable to introduce his motion during the hour set aside for private member's business on Friday, February 13, 2004.

Since it has not been possible to arrange an exchange of positions in the order of precedence, I am directing the clerk to drop that item of business to the bottom of the order of precedence.

Private members' hour will therefore be suspended, and the House will proceed with the business before it.

It being 5.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP) moved that Bill C-436, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (sponsorship of relative), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today in the House to speak to my bill, Bill C-436. In actual fact, we had an hour of debate on the bill before the House was prorogued, but under the changes that have taken place we are now going back to the first hour. I am pleased to have this opportunity to have another debate and to hear from other members about the bill.

Since we debated it the last time in that first hour of debate, I did want to let members know that I have had various meetings across the country in various communities. There has been tremendous support for this bill. We have received petitions, postcards and feedback from organizations in Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and other places that I visited. There has been tremendous support for the idea that is contained in the bill.

Just to briefly recap, this is a very straightforward proposal. It is a proposal that builds on a policy that already exists within our immigration system, and that is to support the reunification of families.

Under this bill, a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident would be provided with a once in a lifetime opportunity to sponsor a relative who would not otherwise be qualified or considered as a member of the family class as it exists now. What this bill would do is strengthen and assist family reunification in Canada.

Private Members' Business

We believe that the current family class sponsorship rules are very restrictive. In fact, in a question and answer paper that I sent around to members of the House, we laid out who it is that can be sponsored now under the existing rules, but there are many relatives that cannot be sponsored. Therefore, the purpose of the bill is to simply allow a permanent resident or a citizen to select a family member who does not qualify under the rules. A person could apply for it and bring a family member to Canada.

I do want to deal with some of the questions that arose during that earlier hour of debate. I think that while there was general support for the principle of what was contained here, there were questions such as, for example, would this not create a huge backlog within the immigration system? I would reply to that by saying that I think all of us know—and certainly members who have participated in the citizenship and immigration committee are very aware of the fact—that there are huge problems with the current immigration system. In fact, there are backlogs that exist now. The citizenship committee has, on a number of occasions and in a report just a few months ago, called for additional resources to be provided to deal with this chronic backlog.

This is a much larger issue around needing adequate resources within this department. I have said many times in the House and in committee that I always feel that the lack of resources in this department is one way that the government actually, through the back door, finds a way to not meet its own commitment of saying that the level of immigration would be about 1% of the Canadian population each year. That policy is on the books, but the way the government gets around it is by actually ensuring that this backlog exists.

My point in debating and seeking support for this bill is that hard-working families should not bear the blame of the problems that are plaguing the citizenship and immigration department. We need to fix those problems. We need to provide adequate resources to that department. For example, one thing we could do is make sure the money that is created through the landing fee is actually going back into the supports and services in that department.

So the criticism was made that we would be adding to the backlog. I understand that point, but I think we need to address that as an overall issue. In fact, bringing this bill to committee I think would allow us to open up the debate and to look at the issue of resources that are within the department.

Second, there were some questions about how many people we are talking about. If this bill were approved, what potentially would we be talking about in terms of people coming to Canada? That is something I cannot answer categorically, of course, because if this bill were approved it would allow a potential for permanent residents and citizens to sponsor someone.

• (1730)

However, I will say this. In 1993, the number of people sponsored under the family class provision was 110,000. Today, though, the projection for the arrival of family members is much lower. It is now at around 60,000. I think members can see that there has been a shift in the program and that the family class program has actually decreased over a number of years.

I feel that Bill C-436 would allow a bit more flexibility. It is not about a major overhaul of the system, which I could argue on other occasions desperately needs to be done. This is actually a very modest proposal that would simply provide more openness and flexibility under the family class rules.

I would also like to point out that the idea of doing this did not come from me, although when I heard about it I thought it was a great idea. It actually came from a former minister of immigration. When she was in Vancouver, this idea was put out to the community. It was not just floated; it was a fairly concrete idea that was suggested by the minister at the time. Of course it received tremendous support immediately, both within the local media and within the community. Within a very short period of time, a large number of petitions went around the community supporting the idea of a once in a lifetime bill.

Subsequent to that, the minister moved on and the idea was dropped. I thought it was a fabulous idea and asked myself why we should waste this kind of good, creative approach that would provide a modest change to the system. I picked up the idea as a private member's bill. I wanted to make that point because the bill actually originated from the government side.

I do think that Bill C-436 is related to larger issues around citizenship and immigration. Today I was very proud to be joined at a press conference by two of my colleagues, the member for Windsor—St. Clair and the member for Winnipeg Centre, where we spoke about this once in a lifetime bill. Also, today we introduced in the House a bill to ban racial profiling in Canada. We also introduced a new website launched by the NDP called Canadians4Justice.

We have done these three things as major initiatives because we are concerned about what is taking place in our society. There is more targeting of people of visible minorities or of different religious backgrounds. We have seen this particularly in the Canadian Muslim community and the Canadian Arab community. Even here in Ottawa an outrageous incident took place in a restaurant not far away from Parliament Hill where the police in effect raided the restaurant and were quite, I would say, over the top in their actions. They handcuffed all the black people in the restaurant and left the lone Caucasian white person alone. So there is the whole issue around the targeting of minorities, both in terms of individual incidents and also in a more systemic way in terms of how the system is functioning. For example, we are seeing an increase in refugees who are being put into detention. We are also seeing more people being stopped at borders by officials.

We are very concerned about this, so we launched these three proposals today. I think this issue is very much resonating in the broader community, because people are very concerned about the targeting of immigrants and visible minorities. Some are people who have been here for generations but happen to have a different colour of skin. This is something we should be concerned about.

I feel that Bill C-436 is a small step in making our system fairer and more accessible to people. I do feel that sometimes it is not very politically popular to talk about immigration or to be supportive of immigration—sometimes it is and sometimes it is not—but I feel that as members of Parliament we have a responsibility to make sure that the system is working and to point out its shortcomings.

Private Members' Business

•(1735)

Today this bill is really put forward in that spirit. It is about saying that we can support families in this country. It is about supporting diversity. I had a very tragic case in my own riding of Vancouver East that I think dramatizes what the bill is about. I am sure some people may be aware that a young Filipino boy was murdered by other young people near a park in east Vancouver.

The tragedy of the story is that the mother had come from the Philippines as a live-in caregiver, a domestic worker. She had three sons. She was only able to sponsor two sons because one of them did not qualify under the family class. One of her sons was murdered, the youngest one. There was a huge outpouring in the community about this situation. I attended the funeral. There were probably a thousand people at the funeral as well as all kinds of political representatives. There was just such an outpouring of grief about what had happened to this family.

We actually helped the family get the older brother from the Philippines to Canada on a special ministerial permit so he could attend the funeral and support his mother—this is the oldest son—and his middle brother. He came to Canada on a special ministerial permit which we luckily, with the support of the minister, were able to get in a day.

The irony is that this fellow will now have to go back because he came on a visitor's permit. He will not qualify. I feel that this is a very good example of where a policy such as this one, based on family reunification, would allow this mother to bring her oldest son to come to Canada to help this family make it through, because there he is, thousands of miles away. Because he is over 25, he would not qualify under the family class as it is now.

I know there are many other situations and really heartbreaking stories. I know that members in the earlier debate spoke about some of those stories.

What do we do about it? The system is not working properly. I hope very much that even if there are questions about the bill, members will support the principle here, the principle of family reunification and allowing this little bit of flexibility within the system to say that once in a lifetime a person could sponsor someone who would not otherwise qualify. All the other rules would apply. There are all kinds of screenings that people have to go through and so on. All of those things would apply.

I hope the bill can make it through debate and go to committee where it can have a thorough examination, as we do in committee. We can hear witnesses and all the rest of it. Then a decision will be made.

I seek the support of other members of the House for the bill, in particular members on the government side. I seek their support for the bill to allow it to go to the next step. When it was first debated the government was not that sympathetic to the idea, but I know that we have a new parliamentary secretary, the member for Vancouver Centre, who I know is very familiar with these issues. I know that she is very supportive and understands the importance of family reunification and what it means to people in our community of Vancouver and certainly in communities across the country as well.

I am hopeful. We have a new minister who I understand is very close to the issues and what is happening. Therefore I am being a little optimistic that with a new minister and a new parliamentary secretary we will get a little shot at this. Instead of them closing the door and saying, "It is a private member's bill, shut the door on that one", I am hoping that we might have a good debate, that the principle of what is being put forward will be supported and that we can seek the support of other parties as well. I look forward to hearing comments and debate from other members of the House.

•(1740)

Mr. Murray Calder (Dufferin—Peel—Wellington—Grey, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-436.

The bill seeks to amend Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act by granting every citizen or permanent resident the opportunity to sponsor, once in the sponsor's lifetime, one foreign national who is a relative but not a member of the family class.

The concept of once in a lifetime sponsorship is not new. Governments and stakeholders have debated and analyzed whether such a provision would be workable for several years.

All of us believe in the principle of expanding the family class and making it easier for people to sponsor their loved ones abroad. However, the one time sponsorship option such as that proposed in Bill C-436 is fundamentally flawed for a number of reasons.

Past experience indicates that even with more resources, the increase in the backlogs and processing times for this and other categories of immigrants that could be generated by such an open ended system would seriously undermine the integrity and credibility of the whole immigration program.

Bill C-436 will have the effect of adding a new class to the immigration program and introducing new opportunities for fraud. Since relationships outside the nuclear family are often not well documented and usually are very difficult to verify, the government would need to significantly increase resources to investigate and confirm each claim for sponsorship made under this new section.

In 1988 family intake nearly doubled over two years, thanks to a similar arrangement to include all unmarried sons and daughters in the family class. The escalated number of backlogs arising out of this program, despite its termination in 1993, affected the Department of Citizenship and Immigration for many years.

Even putting aside the potential for huge backlogs, Bill C-436 would undoubtedly undermine our efforts to prevent marriages or common law relationships of convenience and adoptions of convenience since these persons could be sponsored without regard to the merits of their relationship with the sponsor.

It could also undermine the economic component of the immigration program, as many failed economic immigrants have distant relatives in Canada who could easily sponsor them.

Private Members' Business

We have already made provision for sponsoring individuals outside the family class under certain circumstances. There is little reason to duplicate this in a separate piece of legislation with such serious problems.

Canadians and permanent residents today can sponsor a foreign national who is not a member of the family class, provided that they have no family residing in Canada or abroad. Section 117(1)(h) of the new immigration refugee protection regulations defines a foreign national as a member of the family class with respect to a sponsor regardless of age if the sponsor does not have a spouse, common law partner, conjugal partner or any other immediate family member in Canada or abroad. Individuals can also apply to sponsor a non-family class relative under section 25 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act itself which allows a minister to grant a foreign national permanent residence status or an exemption from any applicable criteria of the act on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

As well, the government passed a series of new regulations just last year to make it much easier for Canadians and permanent residents to sponsor their loved ones from abroad and significantly expand the family class in a well managed and sustainable way. These changes provide for equal treatment under the law for common law couples of the opposite and the same sex by expanding the family class to include the terms "common law partners" and "conjugal partners".

• (1745)

They also expand the definition of "dependant child" to better reflect the longer child dependencies in certain instances. They also reduce the age at which Canadian citizens or permanent residents are eligible to sponsor from 19 years to 18 years old.

These enhancements to the family class reflect the government's policy intention of easing family reunification while ensuring that the immigration program itself maintains an appropriate balance between the intake of refugees as well as economic and family class immigrants.

We have expanded the family class in a well planned and responsible way. The government has made provision for individuals who wish to sponsor an individual not included in the family class without jeopardizing the integrity of the immigration program itself.

I therefore find it difficult to support the concept of a once in a lifetime sponsorship and will not vote in favour of the fundamentally flawed scheme set out in Bill C-436.

• (1750)

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from the NDP for introducing this bill. It is very important, as she so ably pointed out, that we re-examine from time to time how effective and how friendly our immigration system is to the people who are dependent on it.

The member, like the Conservative Party, believes very strongly in immigration and supports immigration. The Conservative Party wants immigration to continue to be a building block of our country, both economically and in human resources terms.

The bill before us would allow each citizen or permanent resident in Canada to sponsor an individual who is a relation one time during their life. I applaud the member's generosity of spirit that motivates her to put this forward. As she says, and as my colleague from the government just pointed out, this is an idea which has been debated and brought forward before. It is always good to debate; it is always good to have new ideas put forward.

The member who moved the bill has told us that it is a straightforward bill to facilitate the reunification of families. I know from personal experience that it can be a real burning desire for families to be together.

When my parents came to Canada I was just a year old and all the family that I have followed me because I am the oldest. My mom had 13 brothers and sisters in the country from where she emigrated and she missed them very much. I know that in many instances she wished they would be closer so that they could visit and have the kind of family closeness that most families enjoy. However, my parents made the choice to move quite far away from their respective families and we did not get to see my aunts, uncles and cousins very often and still do not, but that was a choice they made. In my opinion it was a very good choice for me because I love Canada and I love being a Canadian. Although I enjoy visiting my relatives from time to time, my heart and my home are here.

The point is, how far does Canada want to go and how far does Canada need to go? What would be in the best interests of Canada as far as opening the door for people who have made the choice to come to Canada to bring in other family members who are not immediate family members, who are not spouses, or about to be spouses, dependent children, or parents or grandparents? That really is the issue before us.

I listened very closely to my colleague. I know she has given these concerns a great deal of anxious thought, but I would suggest that there are a lot of practical questions and issues that would make a thoughtful person very reluctant to move precipitously in the direction the member is talking about.

Canada is a country built on immigration. We are proud of that. We want that to continue. We want to continue to build our country by bringing in the most skilled, the most dedicated, the most able people in the world to help us build what we believe is the best country in the world. Because we are a country built by immigration, most of us have family members, aunts, uncles, cousins to whatever degree, in other countries of the world. I would venture to say there would be many millions of Canadians who are citizens or permanent residents who have family members in other countries.

• (1755)

If each and every permanent resident and citizen were able to sponsor a new individual, the question is, how would we manage this? There would be millions of people qualified to take advantage of this new level of generosity in immigration. This is not a small number.

I know that my colleague knows this because she has been on the immigration committee, and been a very fine and active member. I see a problem with millions of people who would now be qualified to make an application.

I do not see it as straightforward. I see it as an enormous difficulty simply because there are so many people right now in the queue who are having the most appalling time having their applications processed.

The member knows, and we all know, that many people seeking to bring in spouses, seeking to bring in children from different places in the world are facing backlogs of disruptive proportions.

I have a case in my riding at the moment where a family from Kosovo has been seeking to be reunited for 10 years. A husband and wife and their five kids have been separated because of the terrible situation in Kosovo. The children have had only fleeting visits with the father. They are not able to get the family reunited and it has taken an emotional toll on the parents.

More than that, the terrible result of children being raised without a dad is a burden on a mother who came from a desperate situation to a situation where she is without the resources and support of a family. This family is seeking to be reunited. There is a backlog and steps have to be taken. The appeals are consuming a great amount of time.

I am pointing out that there are cases where we have an immediate family which needs to be together and the system is not able to facilitate that as it is. If we add to that several million more applications, I just cannot see this being practical. With all the good heart and will in the world, we must be fair to people. We must be fair and not tell them to come, that we want them, that they are welcome and we are opening the door even further. It is a false invitation because the resources are not there to accommodate these people who are in the lineup. To make a longer lineup will simply hurt everybody.

The second problem that concerns me, and I have mentioned this before, is the resources available for the settlement of newcomers to Canada. The member will know this because we travelled across the country around this time last year. We heard over and over, from settlement service providers, how the lack of funds and how the restriction in what service providers are able to do has created hardship for many newcomers. There is a lack of programs such as English as a second language. There is a lack of networking to get jobs. There is a lack of resources to help the communities integrate, welcome and bring together newcomers and people who are established in the community.

I know the member argues that the sponsor would support these individuals. However, the member knows and we know, although I do not know how to fix it necessarily, that the sponsorship provisions do not work. They are not enforced much of the time.

I had in my office, just a little while ago, a man who had brought his mother over from their country of origin saying he could not support her and that she had to go on welfare. I asked him if he considered this when he agreed to sponsor her and did he not have an obligation to support her? He said that he just could not. Sometimes those sponsorship obligations do not provide the safety net for newcomers that they ought to and this is a tremendous problem.

• (1800)

It is not generosity to open the door to people to come into a situation where they are going to face dislocation and hardship in a

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magnitude they did not expect, where backlogs grow, where support systems flounder, where their foreign credentials cannot be recognized and they are forced into lines of work that they never contemplated.

There are a number of problems with our system that must be addressed before we throw other people at the mercy of a system that is already failing many of the individuals who are already in the lineup to come to Canada.

I know that the member is sincerely and generously inclined to Canada's goodwill toward people coming here, but I think in fairness to them and in fairness to those who are already in the lineup, this is not the way that we should proceed. I would counsel against moving ahead with this bill at this time.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak in this debate on behalf of my colleague, the hon. member for Laval Centre, who could not be in the House today and asked me to speak for her. Here, then, is the message she would have wanted to present to the House at this time.

There are certain debates in this House that require making decisions in the light of a particular context and realities that cannot be ignored.

Today, I have the opportunity to speak to such an issue, one which calls on our judgment and demands thorough reflection, in order to determine our position.

The purpose of the bill put forward by the hon. member for Vancouver East, Bill C-436, is to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. The proposed amendment says, and I quote:

Subject to the regulations, a Canadian citizen or permanent resident may, once in their lifetime, sponsor one foreign national who is a relative but is not a member of the family class.

We are well acquainted with the hon. member for Vancouver East. This proposal reflects her humanitarianism and her great generosity. We commend her on the spirit behind this bill.

Unfortunately, we cannot support her bill as it is currently formulated. Three major reasons underlie our position: the lack of clarity of the bill; immigration priorities, particularly Canada's role in refugee protection; and finally, budgetary constraints and the resulting choices for the allocation of resources.

However, the Bloc is prepared to discuss this further before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The reason the Bloc is expressing its reticence about this bill is its lack of clarity. When we say that the proposal by the hon. member for Vancouver East lacks clarity, I wonder, for example, what she means by:

—one foreign national who is a relative but is not a member of the family class.

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What are the acceptable limits of the definition of “a relative”? For example, is a third cousin counted as a relative? Is there a requirement that they share a genetic ancestor and, if so, in what percentage? What is the dividing line between an acceptable relative and one who is not, if the list of admissible persons has not been defined?

We easily see that there is a great deal of room for arbitrary decisions. If the hon. member for Vancouver East wishes to broaden the family class to include other specific family members, she should state that in her bill, because without that, it is too vague and does not make it possible to determine which cases are admissible and which are not.

For example, we know that certain cultures consider family much more broadly than blood relations. For some people, a very close friend or neighbour is like a brother or at least like a member of the family.

The current list of persons admissible in the family class is already well defined. How could we justify an amendment this far-reaching without including some limits?

The hon. member should be able to show how many people would be affected by this new measure. Has she any credible and relevant studies on this? For now, we can only presume that this kind of proposal would have allowed 229,091 additional sponsorship applications in 2002.

With respect to the priority given to asylum seekers, Canada's immigration plan is split 60-40. In other words, immigrants are selected as follows: 60% are economic immigrants, meaning businesspeople, and self-employed and skilled workers; the remaining 40% are family class immigrants, asylum seekers and so forth.

• (1805)

Of this 40%, more or less 30% are family class immigrants, 9% are refugees and 1% others.

Clearly, it is the asylum seekers who will pay for the new measures to increase the number of people who qualify for family class. Anyone tempted to decrease the 60% should consider the fact that before family members of a permanent resident or Canadian citizen can be brought here, the primary applicant must qualify to enter Canada first, as part of the 60% in the economic class. So, this proposal, which would reduce that percentage, does little to improve the situation.

With respect to the 40%, the headlines show deportation cases for asylum seekers being dismissed almost every week. Clearly, the numerous conflicts and civil wars in a growing number of countries—Colombia, Algeria, Palestine-Israel, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan—should make democratic countries listen more carefully to people seeking refugee status. Because of inadequate budgets, Canada turns away thousands of asylum seekers every year whose lives are in danger in their homelands. With larger budgets, Canada could better meet its obligations as a signatory of the Geneva convention with respect to protecting refugees.

By allowing more immigrants to sponsor “distant” relatives, we are using resources that could save lives by accepting more asylum seekers. Politics and public administration are no exception; as with

daily life we have to make responsible choices while taking various constraints into account.

Would it be better to bring a cousin to Canada or offer asylum to a Colombian family whose members might be tortured or killed if they were returned to Colombia?

Now, to touch on the budget limitations. Last of all, although the humanitarian intent of the member for Vancouver East is praiseworthy, her bill does not take into consideration the realities of Citizenship and Immigration Canada's budget.

Canada's immigration objective is to admit the equivalent of 1% of the Canadian population, or 310,000 immigrants annually. There are two key reasons for this: compensating for the drop in population and filling the need for skilled workers, particularly with economic class immigrants.

In 2002, Canada admitted 229,091 immigrants, compared to the 2001 figure of 250,484. The drop was in part a result of the department's inability to process any more because of budget restraints and the costs related to settlement and integration. It is not enough just to admit people into the country; it is also important to ensure that they receive proper services for a smooth integration into the host society.

This is the major problem with the whole immigration issue. The virtual absence in the recent throne speech of any reference to insufficient resources for immigration is the reason we support this bill in order to have the opportunity to discuss it in committee. In fact, if it is passed on second reading, there will have to be a debate in committee and we then be in a position to prove that the Department of Citizenship and Immigration is incapable of meeting its responsibilities because of insufficient funds. What it more, an analysis in committee would enable us to propose some essential points to be incorporated into the bill of the member for Vancouver East.

By recognizing the humanitarian aspect of Bill C-436, and by accepting its referral to a committee, the Bloc Québécois would help prove that common sense and responsibility dictate that we ask for sufficient funding to provide proper settlement services for those who are admitted, while not ignoring our humanitarian duty to asylum seekers. They must be given priority access to resources.

• (1810)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House to speak about the commitment of our government to strengthen families and about the provisions of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act on family reunification.

[English]

Families are both an anchor and a source of strength to newcomers. They represent the strongest possible foundation and roots for the health and prosperity of communities and of Canada as a whole. It is important to ensure that new families are vibrant and have the tools and resources needed to integrate, participate and feel a sense of belonging to Canada.

Over the past two years the government has achieved this objective through prudent management of the immigration program and a commitment to expanding and integrating the family class. From 1998 to 2001 the family class in Canada moved from 50,882 to 66,713. That represents an increase of almost 16,000 immigrants only in the family class in just four years.

However we felt this was not enough so the government introduced new regulations in 2002 to allow even more individuals to sponsor family members and to speed up the processing of family class applications.

We have expanded the family class to include common-law and conjugal partners of the opposite and same sex, and have increased the dependent age to 22. As well, we have reduced the age at which Canadian citizens are eligible to sponsor from 19 to 18 years and the period of sponsorship undertakings has been reduced in most cases from 10 to 3 years.

These are significant changes and they are designed to facilitate family reunification.

New application rules will assist in the faster processing of applications on behalf of spouses, common-law partners, conjugal partners and dependent children.

[Translation]

In making these changes, we took into account the need to increase people's ability to sponsor family members, while ensuring that the immigration program is managed in a balanced and efficient fashion. This approach clearly serves the best interests of everyone: Canadians, newcomers and our communities.

[English]

Currently the government is expanding the consultation process to ensure municipal leaders and other community stakeholders have a say in immigration matters. The overwhelming majority of newcomers to Canada settle in cities placing enormous demands on their resources, so their input is vital.

Earlier this week the minister met with municipal leaders in Ontario and over the coming months she will meet with other municipal leaders across the country. This dialogue will allow us to increase immigration levels in a way that benefits both the communities and the newcomers themselves.

Provincial stakeholders must be consulted before any changes are made that could radically change the balance between family class and economic immigrants since they could face insurmountable demands on health, educational and social services.

While government has met or exceeded annual immigration targets in the last three years, these targets are developed in close co-

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operation with stakeholders. We are determined to continue this trend of increasing family class over time but we must do so in a fair, balanced, sustainable and consultative way.

The changes proposed by the hon. member for Vancouver East in Bill C-436 runs counter to this process and to the principles of fairness, balance and consultation, and so we cannot support it.

Besides, Canadians or permanent residents who wish to sponsor someone not in the family class can already do so provided they have no family members living in Canada or abroad whom they could sponsor in the family class.

Bill C-436 would expand this concept to grant all citizens in Canada or permanent residents a once in a lifetime sponsorship opportunity, regardless of their circumstances, with little consideration given to their familiarity or relationship with a sponsored individual.

Under Bill C-436, anyone could sponsor nearly anyone else as a member of the undefined relative class without any thought to fiscal support or employability. The new person could then repeat the exercise, as could their sponsored applicant, and so on, creating a multiplier effect. The result would be an almost limitless chain of family class immigration based simply on loose associations.

• (1815)

[Translation]

If this proposal is adopted, not only will we need significant resources to deal with a larger number of cases, but we will also need proportionally more resources to deal with the family class applications, simply to maintain the existing ratio between family and economic class immigration.

Moreover, this could result in new frauds and it could undermine the integrity of the economic class immigration, since a significant number of economic class immigrants have distant relatives in Canada who could sponsor them.

[English]

We on this side of the House are committed to the principle of uniting families. I know the hon. member for Vancouver East's heart is in the right place but past experiences show that this should be done with appropriate intake controls in place to prevent abuse and to make sure that changes do not overwhelm the integration and immigration program.

We need to consult with local stakeholders to ensure increases in family class levels are achieved in a way that benefits everyone, and the minister plans to do that.

By following all of these processes, all Canadians can then be sure of a fair, efficient and equitable immigration program for many years to come.

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Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I anticipated this opportunity because of the response that I, like a number of other members of my caucus, have received as we have taken these proposals to our constituents and the citizens of Canada more generally.

It was interesting that as we all came back we were comparing our experiences, having reached out to the community in this fashion, of the very similar responses that we got. I have to say that it was one of those occasions when as members of Parliament we were deeply touched by the sensitive nature and expressions that we got from family members.

Two categories stand out in my mind. One was the number of parents, and I have to say mothers in particular, who talked about the need that they had to reunify their families. It often was a situation where the family had come but one of the children, being an adult child, could not be sponsored under the definition in the act. Therefore they would bring two or three of their children but one had to be left behind with other family members in the country of origin. It was telling, the number of times parents broke down in tears when they told of having to make that decision, but for the good of the whole family they came.

The other category where we heard these expressions of sorrow in many cases were the siblings of those children who had been left behind. This situation that I am talking about is not an isolated case. This has occurred numerous times with families who are here, who are citizens and good, solid members of our communities. It was just very emotional.

I have to say that when I hear some of what I will call the nitpicky rationalizations that we are hearing from the government and from some of the speakers in the opposition, I wish they would go out and listen to some of those stories. They may then set aside some of these almost technical arguments that they are producing and say that we have a major problem with the reunification of families in this country.

To suggest that the existing provision in the act says that if they do not have any family here, they can bring somebody, does not answer the issue at all and, in fact, does not address the issue of reunification whatsoever in those situations that I have described.

The other indication, which we have heard both from the official opposition and the government, is that this just is not workable. The reality is that this was looked at very extensively by the immigration committee back in 2002.

In the spring of 2002, albeit it was a definition of extended families that was smaller than what we produced and proposed, we were proposing in an amendment before the committee, as we were moving to amend the bill, that grandparents and brothers and sisters would be defined as family members and could be sponsored. That vote, after a great deal of discussion and analysis by the committee, failed by only one vote. It was moved by the NDP and it got the support of six of the members. Seven voted against it, and, of course, at that time all those members were government members.

I believe the proposal we are making addresses some other issues that badly need to be addressed, such as the backlog, which has been mentioned by a number of the other speakers. We are well aware of

it. However what is being ignored in the debate, particularly from the government's side, is that a good number of the people who are in that backlog now are family members as we would define them, that is, they are brothers and sisters and children of people who are already citizens and residents of Canada.

• (1820)

If in fact we move them into the sponsorship category, that is, they could be sponsored once in a lifetime by a family member, we actually would reduce that backlog. We also would reduce the amount of work that would be needed, because the sponsorship process is a faster one. It requires less work on the part of our civil service to process the application. I can give an estimate that somewhere between 25% and 50% less time is spent on the sponsorship program than is spent on the regular applicant.

So there would be a substantial reduction in the backlog and there would be a substantial reduction in the amount of time that our civil service would have to work on these applications. That would go some distance to then reduce the amount of the backlog for the rest of the people who have been waiting for their applications to be processed, as we have heard, for as long as five years, oftentimes successfully at the end of that period of time.

There is another point I would like to make this evening. It is something that I do not think we had anticipated, but it came out regularly at the sessions that we held across the country when we were speaking to family members who would be interested in taking advantage of this sponsorship program. That was the number of times that family members stood up and said that there is also a dollar issue here, not just the humanitarian issue of reunifying siblings or parents and children. There is also a financial issue, because the reality is that in many cases the family members who are here are sending money back to that country of origin. In a great many cases, the family members who are left behind in that other country are in very poor financial shape and need the assistance that flows from the family members who are here.

We know about this. It came up recently at one of the G-7 meetings. We know about the amount of money that is sent out of the country for family members.

I can recall one man at the session we had in my city of Windsor. He was the first one to mention this. He indicated that he was sending back in excess of \$5,000 a year. As he said that, it was interesting to see the number of other hands that went up for people wanting to say the same thing. This was not a large crowd. We had about 100 people at that meeting. There were at least 10 families in that room who were sending back in excess of \$5,000 a year. There were several who were sending back in excess of \$10,000 a year.

That is money that is flowing out of Canada. We can multiply that by the tens of thousands because of the responsibility that the family members who are here feel for those family members who are back in the country of origin. That is a substantial drain of cash out of this country, which would not be occurring if Parliament took advantage of the proposal that we are making to reunify those families to bring them here.

Another point has been missed by the government. We are finding that the number of people who have been coming here in the last decade shows a significant difference in regard to the two patterns we can look at. If we look at the new immigrants or newcomers who came here between 1981 and 1991, they were hired into employment situations that were in keeping with their experiences and their academic backgrounds at a much higher rate than those who came between 1991 and 2001. The reports on this are out there. It is a well established fact now.

This is one of the reasons I would suggest that we could move to deal with that problem. If we did reunify families, if we did allow them to sponsor, that rate of people not being able to find appropriate employment would drop dramatically because the family would be here in the country to back them up and to provide them with assistance.

Private Members' Business

There are numerous reasons why the bill should be accepted at second reading and passed on to committee so that further investigation can be made and we can move dramatically in a direction that will reunify families in this country.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hour 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.

It being 6:27 p.m., the House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow, pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:27 p.m.)

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