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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 19, 2004

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 19, 2004

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2003-04

A message from Her Excellency the Governor General transmitting supplementary estimates (B) for the financial year ending March 31, 2004, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a copies of the supplementary estimates documents for 2003-04 and a list of the recommended distributions to the appropriate standing committees for consideration of the supplementary estimates.

I also have copies of the supplementary estimates for the Prime Minister, leaders of the parties in the House, and the Treasury Board critics of the opposition parties, and of course, copies will be available for all other members.

* * *

• (1005)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

SCRUTINY OF REGULATIONS

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, CPC): Mr. Speaker, re-elected as the co-chair of the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations.

* * *

CONSTITUTION ACT, 2004

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Fanshawe, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-486, an act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this private member's bill seeks to cap the size of the House of Commons at what it will become after the next election, which is 308 seats.

We do not need to be much of a mathematician to do the mathematics and realize that given our population, if we had the population of the United States, we would have some 3,000 members of Parliament. That would be patently ridiculous of course.

The bill proposes to accommodate any future increase in population which will surely come, as we hope, and accommodate it within the cap of 308. Obviously, by law there has to be future redistributions. They would take place on course, but there would be a changing of the distribution of seats within the cap as per the new demographics of our country.

We are one of the most over-governed countries in the world at all three levels of government, quite frankly, and this bill, if passed, would help address the over-government we have experienced at the federal level.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

MARRIAGE

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today in the House to present six petitions on behalf of citizens of Canada.

The petitioners state that whereas protecting the moral good of society is a natural and serious obligation of elected officials and cannot be left only to religious leaders and institutions; whereas, the defence of traditional marriage as the bond between one man and one woman is a serious and moral good; whereas, marriage as the lasting union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of others cannot and should not be modified by a legislative act or a court of law; whereas, the recent rulings of the appeal courts of Ontario and British Columbia redefining marriage to include same sex partners destroys traditional marriage in law and endangers Canada's social stability and future vitality and health, they request that Parliament take whatever action is required to maintain the current definition of marriage in law".

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 it is my privilege to present to the House a petition dealing with marriage. It is signed by over 400 concerned Canadians.

Supply

The petitioners wish to draw to the attention of the House that the traditional male-female institution of marriage is a serious moral good and should not be modified by legislation or the courts. The petitioners pray and request that the Parliament of Canada take every action at its disposal to uphold and protect the current understanding of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

• (1010)

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Fanshawe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am in receipt of some 25,000 signatures from Londoners and people of the district of London, Ontario. I present the latest 2,000 such signatures that have been vetted by the appropriate process.

These petitioners call on the Government of Canada to do everything possible to uphold the traditional definition of marriage of the union between one man and one woman which has existed since day one of this country when Confederation occurred in 1867.

The petitioners note that the government has shown inconsistency over the past year or so in its defence of marriage. It calls on the Government of Canada to buck up, be consistent, and defend this most fundamental and important of Canadian institutions.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always want the government to buck up and to listen up to some more petitions from petitioners who have been busy at my work in my riding and others.

Many, as has already been mentioned, want the government to pass legislation to recognize marriage as the union and lifelong relationship of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have other petitioners who are concerned about the former Bill C-250 which is still making its way through Parliament. They are concerned about their freedom to express their religious opinions without fear of prosecution or persecution.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have several thousand signatures from people, almost all of them from my riding, calling upon Parliament to assist in protecting children and youth from sexual exploitation and abuse. They would like Parliament to take steps to amend the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to prohibit the development, purchase and ownership of child pornography.

It is one of the largest petitions that I have presented in the last couple of years. It has between 5,000 and 6,000 signatures. The petitioners say that this is a dastardly deed and they want the government to buck up and fix that problem.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to table petitions, literally thousands, that are coming in from Canadians that recognize that the national missile defense program is a unilateral initiative of the U.S. which has plans for dominating the space dimension of military operations in integrating

space forces into war fighting capabilities, that no other country in the world supports.

The petition calls upon Parliament to ensure that Canada objects to the national missile defence program and commits to playing a leadership role in banning nuclear weapons and missile flight tests.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present a petition on behalf of the constituents of Prince George—Peace River from the Peace River side of the riding. Constituents from Buick, Montney, Pouce Coupe, Dawson Creek, Farmington, and Baldonnel call upon Parliament to recognize that the majority of the provinces have no intention of enforcing the federal firearms registration law and that it is now costing taxpayers well in excess of \$1 billion and counting.

They call upon Parliament not to review the firearms registry, but to wind it up, and reallocate the spending to front line policing and effective controls against the illegal weapons at our borders, airports and ports.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a different set of petitions that I wish to table, also indicating that star wars would clearly undermine Canada's proud tradition of supporting arms control and calling on this Parliament to ensure that Canada does not participate in the star wars missile defence program, that it strongly condemns George Bush's destabilizing plans and that it works instead with our partners in peace for more arms control and to peacefully bring about an end to the production and sale of weapons of mass destruction and any material used to build them.

* * *

• (1015)

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 Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—AMERICAN ANTIMISSILE DEFENCE SHIELD

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should oppose the proposed American antimissile defence shield and, therefore, cease all discussions with the Bush administration on possible Canadian participation.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if you were to seek it, I believe that you will find consent for the following motion:

That at the conclusion of today's debate on the Bloc Quebecois opposition motion, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to the end of government orders on Tuesday, February 24, 2004.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak on behalf of the Bloc Quebecois today about the antimissile defence shield.

From the outset, as I did last week, I would like to explain that I come from a different country than you do, Mr. Speaker. It is not better or worse, but definitely different. With respect to many of the issues raised in this Parliament for the past decade or so, since the Bloc Quebecois arrived here in 1993, we have stood apart from the rest of the members in this House on all issues. Whether we like it or not, Quebec culture is very different and is recognized as being distinct from the culture in the rest of Canada. It is normal for our positions to vary slightly, reflecting the region or country we come from.

Naturally, we have different opinions on the issue of the missile defence shield. I take as an example the whole question of the war in Iraq. In Canada, whether one likes it or not, it was in Quebec that the largest demonstrations took place. In all the big cities in Quebec we stood out by having the highest rate of turnout for the demonstrations. I took part in two or three demonstrations in Montreal, in Arctic weather; there were still 100,000 or 150,000 people in the streets. That was a sign that we in Quebec have a different vision of war and peace.

I would even say that in Quebec we are warriors for peace. The people of Quebec want to find answers to the basic questions, at home and elsewhere on the globe. Quebecers have a great deal of confidence in mediation, consultation and negotiation, and place great importance on them. This is not a people that wants to impose its will by force—economic, military or other. This is a people that wants to live in harmony both inside and outside its borders, and in the world at large.

It is important to state that right at the beginning. It will not surprise anyone that the motion before us today has been introduced by the Bloc Quebecois. I have seen the Liberal Party's poll statistics, which say we are on the wrong track, because 70% of Canadians appear to support the government's intention to get closer to the Americans through the missile defence shield. There was no breakdown on the numbers, but I am sure that in Quebec the figures are probably reversed. Probably 70% of the people object to the shield and only about 30% say they agree with it.

It is important to provide a clear picture of the situation at the beginning and say that in Quebec we are different and proud of our difference, because we are pacifists. As I said before, and I have said often, the people of Quebec are warriors for peace.

We have already talked about the missile defence shield. The Minister of Foreign Affairs presented a motion in the House to hold a take-note debate and we were able to talk about it at length. Something has made us curious. The minister says that if we are

Supply

going to discuss the weaponization of space, the government does not want to talk about it. With that, he is ignoring the whole American plan.

Someone in the United States is in possession of the overall plan and that is the Missile Defence Agency. It has submitted a clear multistage plan. First, it involves the installation of about 30 land and sea missiles in autumn of 2004. This autumn. Then, there will be the deployment of 20 additional missiles in 2005 and subsidies to launch studies on the installation of counter-missiles in space. I thought that was important enough to mention. The plan also provides for the installation at sea of giant detection radars and a fleet of detection satellites. It is all in the plan. We are talking about space-based interceptors as early as 2012 and the famous laser-equipped Airborne aircraft that could launch missiles at us. We have many concerns about all of this, and I will come back to them.

To the government which says that it will step out if the weaponization of space is on the agenda, I reply that, by approving our involvement in the plan submitted by the Missile Defence Agency, we have already given our consent to go all the way. We cannot adhere to the first two stages of a plan and then say we will opt out.

● (1020)

I am not sure we are being told all the truth here. I will come back to the lack of transparency.

This has been assessed. Before going along with that kind of policy, the threats have to be assessed. I believe the threats were inadequately assessed by the United States as well as by Canada. If we get on board, we have to know why.

Of course, there are other issues at stake, like our important economic ties and the fact that we have distanced ourselves from the Americans on the Iraqi issue, which was not a good thing. I also realize that one of the main goals of the Prime Minister is rapprochement with the United States. But do we have to do it through the army and the defence shield?

We think the answer is no and that a poor preliminary assessment is to blame. I have three examples with regard to this poor assessment. Would a missile defence shield have prevented three commercial planes from striking the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? No. That danger, that threat, is real, and it is worth investing in measures to counter such actions.

My second example: could a missile defence shield prevent a ship 200 km off the American coast from launching a cruise missile on New York, Boston or Los Angeles? No. A missile defence shield could not prevent such an attack. That kind of threat is much more concrete and real than a possible intercontinental missile strike on the United States.

There is one statistic that really bothers me. I am told that only 3% to 4% of containers entering Canadian ports are inspected. According to my calculations, 95% or 96% of these containers are not inspected. I do not want to be dramatic, but a weapon of mass destruction could be placed inside a container entering a port such as Vancouver or Montreal. This is much more likely to happen than an intercontinental missile strike on the United States.

Supply

As a result, we think that there has been a poor threat assessment. Why seek to invest so much money in this project? We have an answer. We think it is because of the military industrial complex. In a moment, we will talk about the financial costs. There is also a cost associated with a country's sovereignty, but the financial costs are astronomical. These military companies will profit. The most recent amount, for \$700,000, granted by the Minister of National Defence, will go to Raytheon. In my opinion, the assessment is inadequate.

Now, is it possible that a missile will be launched? We need to get one thing straight right now. If a massive attack is launched, even with the system that will be developed in several decades, it will be impossible to stop it. We must go back to what George Bush said. Could a rogue state launch an interballistic missile attack on us? Often, North Korea and Iran are mentioned. But the situation is already quite critical with regard to China and Russia, because they already have more missiles.

First, I think any country that would launch a missile against the United States would be wiped off the face of the earth. Indeed, the infamous doctrine of mutually assured destruction still holds. In my view, this is very obvious. I fail to see why North Korea, which is currently the only country capable of delivering an atomic missile onto American territory, would cause its own destruction by doing that. So, the risk of an intercontinental ballistic missile attack is minimal. Does this risk justify spending money and breaching the Canadian government's foreign policy? We have to think about this.

As regards technical feasibility, we also wonder if it is possible to intercept an intercontinental ballistic missile launched from somewhere in Asia or Russia. At this point in time, we think that the technology is not ready. I will explain why.

● (1025)

So far, nine tests have been conducted and five have succeeded. It must be realized that these tests were conducted in ideal conditions. We knew where the missile was launched from, where the interceptor was located, the time of the launching, the trajectory and, despite all this, four tests failed.

So, let us suppose that a missile is launched without the Americans knowing about it. Sure, NORAD will detect it within five minutes. But the problem is what happens afterwards. It will probably take 20 minutes for the missile to reach American soil. Moreover, the time of launching and the trajectory would not be known. Therefore, the ability to intercept a missile a very questionable.

In terms of costs and technical feasibility, it is almost impossible. In fact, most scientists are saying that they do not see why we should invest that kind of money. However, this may be necessary in the future. Today, we must ask ourselves if this is the kind of spending that we want to make in the future. Later on, I will provide an answer.

At present, in the United States, the government and the Pentagon are estimating that the program will cost between \$80 billion and \$100 billion. However, Nobel economics laureate Kenneth Arrow of Stanford University contends that, for the project to reach its peak, the costs will be between \$800 billion U.S. and \$1,200 billion U.S.

Here in Canada, some may say we are not looking at the same kind of costs.

We will remember that the Minister of Defence has written to his counterpart, saying he was prepared not only to discuss the terms and recommend a mission change to include the whole space shield issue, but also to share some of the costs. The data provides blatant evidence. In fact, we questioned the minister this week about that. He recently awarded a \$700,000 interim contract to Raytheon Canada to upgrade our radar in the Arctic and to participate in a way. An American exercise is scheduled for this summer. Nobody is telling us, but I think that Canada is getting ready to participate in the U.S. program, to track missiles and get involved in the whole space shield deal.

There is price to pay for Canada's sovereignty. For years, Canada has been recognized as a peaceful country. Now, we are getting involved in the Fortress North America, an American concept that is being developed. There is need to defend North America, Canada and the United States. The U.S. is telling Canada, "You have to join us if you want to be protected".

Until now, we have kept our distance, probably because of the big demonstrations in Quebec. We have kept our distance from the Americans in terms of international policy. I understand the reason for wanting to work more closely together but there will be a price to pay if we go too far.

As a sovereignist, I think there is a price to pay in terms of sovereignty. Canada has always maintained multilateral relations. We have good relations with both Europe and with the U.S.

If we want to get closer to the Americans on the economic level, fine, but I do not agree with using the space shield to get closer to them on the military level. This means that the Canadian government is jumping on the American policy bandwagon as far as international relations and world peace are concerned. Canada gained recognition for its lead role in connection with the anti-personnel landmines treaty, even though the U.S. refused to participate.

Why today, under the pretext of rapprochement with the Americans, are we jumping on the U.S. bandwagon and indicating our intention to follow them on the space shield? There is a price to pay for this. We are at risk of weakening our position in Europe and Asia. People will say that Canada has become a puppet of the Americans. They are participating in a project to turn North America into a fortress, protecting themselves at the expense of international policy, at the expense of multilateral international contacts. Going down that road will, in my opinion, lead to a loss of international credibility

● (1030)

This is particularly the case because being part of the shield implies our adherence to the American doctrine of total domination—domination in the air, domination on the land, domination on the seas. Now the U.S. wants to add one more component: domination of space.

It is clear that this is where the Americans are headed. It is also clear that, if the Canadians follow them on this, we are subscribing to their philosophy and compromising our multilateral connections.

Consequently, as far as foreign policy is concerned, we have nothing to gain by sending a Canadian hawk to perch on the same branch as the American hawk. This is not how to solve anything in Canada.

We in Quebec feel it is far from the solution. On the economic level, as I have said, it is fine. On the military, however, I feel it is extremely dangerous to compromise our relations. We stand to gain nothing militarily by sitting on the same branch as the American hawk.

Why is the government doing this? We in the Bloc Québécois have been speaking out against the policy void in this country for two years now. There is no national defence policy. There is no foreign policy.

What does that mean? It means that the government thinks it can do whatever it wants. Yes, indeed. The national defence policy dates back to 1994. It is completely outdated. We are living in a different world today, especially since the attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

Today, our enemy is not even visible anymore. Anyone can appear anywhere armed with a weapon of mass destruction and set it off. That is what is going on in Irak at this moment.

Do you think that if the Americans saw someone dressed in an Iraqi uniform and carrying a gun coming their way, they would let that person approach them? That is not what is happening. It is very ordinary people who come and blow themselves up.

It is commercial planes that were hijacked and flown into the twin towers. It is not intercontinental missiles that hit the towers, but commercial planes.

So there is a huge political void. There is no defence policy and no foreign affairs policy. Moreover, there is an enormous democratic deficit in the issue that is before us today. A handful of civil servants, with the foreign affairs minister and the national defence minister have just decided, on their own, to make a radical change in the Canadian stance on foreign affairs as well as defence.

For weeks, we have been questioning the cabinet ministers about this, because we are concerned by the turn of events. Brigadier General Findley just said that this was a done deal. This does not square with what the foreign affairs minister has been telling us for a long time, "We are gathering information before deciding". But the officers are telling us it is a done deal.

We have a huge democratic void, to the point where the opposition, through the Bloc Québécois, has to move a votable motion on this issue today. Finally, we will know the real intentions of each member of this House.

I have to tell you that the Bloc Québécois will make the vote on this issue a free vote for its members. They will be free to vote according to their conscience. I hope the other parties will follow suit. During the take-note debate on Tuesday night, I heard Liberal members say they were in total disagreement with the present Canadian position.

We will make this a free vote. We have no choice but to condemn the democratic void we have now. I could go on and on, and I could

Supply

talk about the solutions to our security problem, such as disarmament, diplomacy and international assistance to eliminate poverty.

To conclude, I would like to ask in what kind of world we want to live. What kind of world do we want to leave to our children and grandchildren? Do we want a world in which we will be able to show our children the great open skies and tell them they have a future in space, a world where they will be able to hold their head high? Or do we want a world where deadly devices will fill the skies, so that our children will walk with their heads down for fear that the sky will fall?

• (1035)

I urge my colleagues to vote with the Bloc Québécois tonight so that we will have a brighter future than the one held out to us now.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member ended his speech asking what kind of future we want. He also spoke about strengthening our economic ties with the United States.

He is asking if it is honest to say that we will have an economic relationship with a country while refusing to participate in some form of a mutual defence system.

Would it not be more honest for us to admit that we already share a mutual defence system with the United States, that we have been participating in a common defence plan for some time now, with NATO and Norad, and that we see this new initiative as an evolution of Norad?

It is no longer a question of protection against large countries. These days, we must recognize that terrorism and intercontinental ballistic missiles could come from terrorist groups and not from states.

We should discuss that issue. If we do not agree with the weaponization of space, which we all share, are we not better off to be present at the table with our partners and neighbours?

That is my question for the member.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, this is a good question. I want to thank my colleague for asking it.

With regard to security, yes, we agree. However, when we talk about security, we are also talking about threat. I think I was eloquent enough earlier, when I talked about the threat of a commercial aircraft hijacking, of the launching of a cruise missile or the introduction of a weapon of mass destruction in a container. Indeed, this is much more important. In this regard, we are following the Americans. We want to work with them. I do not think this is putting into question the multilateral and international relations that we have always had from the beginning.

As for taking part in a space shield project, which Europe, Asia and Russia are not totally in agreement with, this would put our international relations at risk. This would also put at risk the international reputation of Canada, which is a peace promoting country. Indeed, if we did so, we would be joining in a project that I would qualify as offensive.

Supply

The government is trying to convince us that it is a defence project, but when a country has absolutely nothing to fear, it can take all the offensive measures it wants, because it knows it will not be attacked.

As for security, we are following the Americans in everything that has to do with antiterrorism. However, we should not follow them in this missile defence shield initiative.

[*English*]

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin with the good news and congratulate the member and the Bloc Québécois for bringing forward this motion, in the sense that, as I said during my remarks a couple of nights ago when we had a take note debate on this very issue, although we differ in our position, I do believe it is incumbent upon Parliament to have a free vote of all members and all parties on this issue and allow members to represent their constituents' views on this important issue.

Two nights ago, I laid out my support for Canada's involvement in the ballistic missile defence shield, so I doubt that I will be speaking today other than on questions and comments, because some of my colleagues would like to address this issue. That addresses the issue of the free vote.

Secondly, I want to raise a concern about the motion itself. I notice that it says we should have no more discussions with the Bush administration. As I pointed out two nights ago, there is an election looming in the United States, as there is in Canada. I wonder why the Bloc Québécois would not have said, if that is its intention, that we should not have any more discussions with the Americans, because after November it might not be the Bush administration. It might be the Kerry administration. Will we then have a whole other debate on this subject and another free vote?

It tends to make me a little suspicious that this motion is all about anti-Americanism and anti-Bush rants rather than getting to the true issue of the defence shield. I am opposed to the motion because it says there should not even be discussions.

My other point is, what evidence can the member provide to the House that this is the burning issue in Quebec? I do not believe that it is.

•(1040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, first of all, it has been said that this is an anti-Bush campaign, but for us, this is not the issue at all. It is an anti-antimissile defence shield campaign. If the new administration that will take over after the next election in the United States, whether democrat or republican, maintains its approach as far as the space shield issue is concerned, I can tell my honourable colleague that we will keep on opposing it. It is the principle that we are against, not the Americans. We would still oppose it if the French or the Brits were developing it.

I can tell the member that the largest demonstrations against the war in Iraq took place in Quebec. I have started out by saying that I was from a different country where people are fighting for peace. I can guarantee that Quebecers will always be against militarization, be it on land, at sea or in space.

In fact, we will prove it to you because we are currently campaigning throughout Quebec and we will table the opinions of Quebecers on that issue. I think that they support the position of the Bloc Québécois.

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to applaud the Bloc Québécois for choosing to use its opposition day to engage in this very important debate about missile defence and about any participation by Canada in the weaponization of space, which is clearly where this American initiative is leading. Nobody in their right mind could argue otherwise. As one person said to me earlier today, only a fool could actually think they could fool Canadians into thinking otherwise when we look at all the evidence.

I would like to ask the member for clarification on two points.

I appreciate that there was a great sense of pride by Quebec members of the House on all sides, who were opposed to the Iraqi war, that there was such a massive mobilization within Quebec against the war. I do not discount for a moment how important that was in forcing the government to retreat from its earlier intentions to participate in the Iraqi war and to make the principled decision not to do so.

I want to ask for clarification on this point. The member said that Quebecers are different. He said that people within Quebec are warriors for peace and that makes them different from others in Canada. Would he not acknowledge that it is also true that there are a great number of Canadians outside of Quebec who share that view and are also important in the mobilization?

Second, it is critically important, perhaps on this issue more than any other in our history, for us to work in solidarity across whatever borders and barriers exist to stop the sheer lunacy of Canada participating in the missile defence program and, in fact, to work with people around the world to try to stop the U.S. administration from taking us on to this conveyor belt straight into the weaponization of space.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her question.

I will say it again, the people in Quebec fight for peace. I think our opposition to the war in Iraq proved it.

It does not mean that we will not join forces with others. In fact, yesterday, when I prepared the motion, I advised the NDP that the Bloc Québécois would be raising the issue of the defence shield today. In Quebec, even if we are different, even if we fight for peace, even if our opinions on various issues are different from those shared in the rest of Canada, we do not want to build a Berlin wall around us. We keep saying that we are different and we are proud of it. We are not better or worse than the others, just different and proud of what makes us different.

However, that will not prevent us from joining with people opposing the shield. Quebec alone will not be able to put a stop to this initiative, but Canadians and people all around the world are against the shield. I totally agree with my colleague; we have to join forces.

• (1045)

[*English*]

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise the member that no region of the country has a patent on peace. We all want peace. The question is how do we assure it and what is the best way.

The member raises the question of mutual assured destruction as the way of achieving global peace. I think it is the way that we have achieved the economic destruction of some societies, and puts at risk the chance that they or terrorist groups get the missiles.

Would the member please explain how he sees that doctrine as ensuring global peace?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me the chance to finish what I ran out of time to say in my speech.

I said that the doctrine of mutually assured destruction currently still holds. We did not say we agree with that. That is the current theory. The Bloc Québécois position is not complicated; we favour non-proliferation and disarmament. Perhaps when there are no more nuclear weapons in the United States or anywhere else, there will no longer be a need to hold this debate. That is the basic objective.

We do not think that the creation of an antimissile defence shield is the answer. The answer is more diplomacy, greater international solidarity and complete nuclear disarmament.

I thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to mention what I did not have the time to point out.

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Saint-Jean on his speech. Like other members, including the member for Peace River, I am pleased to have the opportunity for the second time this week to discuss a topic of such great importance to Canada and Canadians.

[*English*]

I will be splitting my time, Mr. Speaker, with the member for York Centre.

I am glad to have an opportunity to discuss this, although it is the second time this week. However, I think it is very important that we have an open and frank discussion among ourselves, that we also try to demystify some of the issues around this and that we talk about the real facts. We should talk about what we plan to do, what we do not intend to do and how we intend to go about it.

What is the nature of the issue about which we are talking about? As members know, and I pointed out the other night, what we intend to do on the government side of the House is to enter into discussions with the United States of America about an issue in which it is committed.

Supply

The member for Saint-Jean and various other members of the House have given extensive reasons why they believe this is not an effective system, that it is will be too expensive, that it will be technologically unfeasible and that the greater threat from terrorism comes from containers, from ships and from other forms of threats.

There is a great deal of validity in all of that. We accept that and that is a debate taking place in the United States of America, as well. Americans are very educated people. Members of Congress and of the Senate are discussing this. They have had that same discussion. It is their treasury they are putting into this, so they are having those discussions. If they put too much money into this, they will not have the resources to deal with other issues.

The first thing we have to start with is to recognize in this debate that whatever reserves we might have about this system, the United States of America has decided to do it in a bipartisan way. This is not an initiative of the Bush administration, as this resolution would seem to suggest. Rather, this begun under Mr. Clinton and had extensive bipartisan support in both the House and Senate of the United States of America.

The first premise we have to start with, as Canadians, is the United States of America is committed to doing it. The Americans will discuss the reservations, how to go about doing it and whether its a major expense or not. However, at the moment they are committed to do it.

Then we have to ask ourselves, as Canadians, how we are being neighbours. We share the continent with our colleagues in the United States of America. We have a long tradition of working with the United States on matters of defence. We have to consider the context of the subtleties of the relationship between this country and their country, the links between our families, the link between our universities, the extensive trade on both sides of the border, the environment and other links.

We are a neighbour. It is as simple as that. In some respects, when it comes to nations, we have a unique relationship. We are probably the closest neighbour ever demonstrated in the history of the world. That is the unique nature of our relationship.

Our neighbour, after careful reflection about its security, about the menaces that threaten it, have come forward and told us that it intends to examine the possibility, as remote as it may be, of having a defence against something that it believes threatens the lives of Americans.

Members of the House would have us, the government of the country, say that we will not even discuss that with our neighbour, that we will turn a deaf ear when our neighbour comes to us and says that it sees a menace and wishes to take protective action, and if this menace comes, it will also happen to hit Canada. Neighbours being neighbours, if the U.S. house is on fire, Canada's house will likely go up with it. Any nuclear, biological weapon or weapon of mass destruction that happens to go off in Buffalo or Seattle, will affect Toronto or Vancouver, and vice versa.

Therefore, does it not behoove us to at least sit at the dining or kitchen table with our neighbours and discuss what the measure is, what they are doing and is there a way in which we can or cannot participate?

Supply

•(1050)

I come from the perspective that we are close neighbours of the United States. We have a long tradition, and I spoke of this the other night in the House, of cooperation with the United States in matters of defence. That cooperation has been extended now, since the terrible events of 9/11, to include our binational planning group, working on the border to ensure it is enforceable and to ensure we do not have to worry about security on the border. Now we are working outside with the United States on other initiatives.

For example, the other night I referred to the recent non-proliferation security initiative in which we have joined. We have done this to ensure that North America is secure, not only by securing ourselves here and taking reasonable measures here, but even beyond that, outside.

I have been very proud to stand with my colleague Colin Powell at international meetings and say that Canada is with the United States in trying to ensure that non-proliferation takes place. I am proud to say that Canada is with the United States in ensuring that containers coming to North America are not loaded with weapons. Canada is with the United States as we go out into the world to make it a safer place. This is not only for us but for everyone. That is the context in which it seems to me we have to approach this motion.

I would urge the member from Halifax, who talks about this administration and star wars and all this rhetoric, that this is not the way neighbours discuss things with one another, at least not neighbours who wish to have neighbourly relations, neighbours who genuinely respect one another. Even if it is only a matter of respect, do we not owe it to our neighbours and friends in the United States to say that even though they have an idea, we may have some problems with it, but we will discuss it them, then take it from there? Let us not start by creating a sense of what it is not.

I said the other night in the House that it is not star wars. The member for Halifax repeats this over and over again. This is a deliberate attempt to try and confuse people to believe that this is something like what President Reagan proposed years ago. It is nothing like that, and many members have pointed it out. It is a defence system that is in a totally different international climate. It is a series of interceptors based on land and on sea which will go up and deal with the missile that is coming in.

There is no reason to suggest that this will result in the weaponization of space. Canada being involved in the discussions can make that case more coherently and cogently than if we are not. Our colleague recently asked the member for St. John's if he did not think we could have more influence on this if we were sitting there talking to them, than if we refused to discuss it with them. If we are concerned about the weaponization of space, then let us be there. Let us be in Norad. Let us make it a part of what we are doing. Someone who is not a partner will have no influence at all.

There are voices in the United States that talk about the weaponization of space. As I said in the House the other night, it is clear those voices are losing ground at the moment, not gaining ground. Their ideas for doing some research has been pushed off from 2008 to 2012. This is simply the research that has been pushed off to 2012.

To point this out as being the weaponization of space is not helping us and Canadians come to a rational way of analyzing the nature of the issue and the problem.

•(1055)

[*Translation*]

We also do not know anything about the issue of cost, which is not on the table, or the issues raised by my colleagues.

To conclude, I will come back to my proposal.

[*English*]

The United States is committed to developing this program. After all the reasons put forward as to why it may or may not make sense, the Americans, under Clinton and the current President, have decided to go ahead. I respectfully suggest that it will happen whether we participate or not. If we do participate, we can influence its development. If we do not, all the issues that have been referred to will be dealt with and we will not be there at the table.

Let us discuss it with the United States. If we have significant problems with it, we do not need to go ahead. I suggest, given the climate, the context of North American defence and our relationship with our United States neighbours, we owe it to them and we owe it to ourselves to discuss these measures with them. That is what the government is doing in this case, nothing more and nothing less.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my comments will be short out of respect for other colleagues in the opposition parties who would like to pose a question.

I said two nights ago that I was certainly supportive of a free vote in the House to bring this issue to a head. I stand by those words. I notice the member from the Bloc Québécois included those sentiments in his opening remarks on the debate today.

I ask the minister if there will there be a free vote on the government side on this issue so that people can represent their constituents? That is the first thing.

Second, if the vote is overwhelmingly against this motion and in support of the missile defence shield, will the government then get on with it and sign on as a partner in this with our American allies so we can move forward in developing this missile defence shield for North America?

Hon. Bill Graham: Mr. Speaker, I have not consulted with the House leader about the nature of the vote on this issue.

Our new Prime Minister has made it clear that he wants two things to happen. He wants members of Parliament to be more engaged, more able to make up their own minds and vote, and, at the same time, he wants the government to have the ability, through a structured series of votes, to carry out its business. Those are the guiding principles before the House leader in deciding the nature of the vote that will take place on Tuesday night.

I appreciate the support of the member for Peace River on the principle. I am confident that the majority of the members of the House support the notion that we should enter into discussions with the United States of America on this issue.

I think the majority of members in the House recognize that this is a serious issue, one that the government must enter into negotiations and discussions with the United States to see whether it is in Canada's interest to participate. Those are the discussions and that is what will be before the House next Tuesday night.

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister's speech does not surprise me. This is more or less what he has explained this week. I find that his image of neighbours is a good example.

We are the Americans' neighbours, and they have the bigger house, much bigger than ours. I want to remind the minister that, the last time, we told our American neighbours we did not support the destruction of our Iraqi neighbour. We said so. We had a policy and we decided not to follow the neighbour that wanted to destroy the Iraqi house.

Why today should we tell our American neighbour that we agree that he should install a great big dome on his house, which would cover ours, when other neighbours and the neighbourhood do not agree? This is the problem.

We have always been go-betweens, ready to get involved in peace endeavours. Now, because our neighbour has a larger house than ours, we want to combine forces and have a dome installed on our house, so the neighbour can impose its law everywhere.

The neighbourhood example is a good one, but there are also the other neighbours. We are turning our other neighbours into bad friends. Of course, we will be good friends with the American neighbour.

Hon. Bill Graham: Mr. Speaker, I find the analogy with what happened last year very interesting.

First of all, I reject entirely the comment that the member from Halifax just made when she said that it was public opinion that forced the government to change its position. That was not the case at all. The Prime Minister met with President Bush and stated clearly that Canada would not be taking part in the war against Iraq without a UN resolution.

Coming back to our good neighbour image, this clearly illustrates the nature of our relations. Last year, we got into a disagreement with the United States and we refused to follow their example. However, discussions have taken place. The Prime Minister discussed the matter with Mr. Bush several times. I myself had a few talks with Mr. Powell. There were discussions and negotiations. There was a disagreement, but we managed to solve it like neighbours.

There is a disagreement, but we first need to talk before we decide what we want to do. This is exactly what we are proposing to do by discussing this issue now.

[*English*]

Hon. Art Eggleton (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the second time this week we have entered into a debate about ballistic missile defence, so let it not be said that the House has not had adequate opportunity to debate the matter.

Supply

In terms of the vote, we will have a vote on this before any decision is made by the government because the Bloc vote will occur next Tuesday. In terms of a free vote, I venture to say there will be more freedom on this side of the House than we will probably see on that side because I know there are people on this side of the House who do not necessarily favour the position that I am favouring, which is that I oppose this Bloc motion. I very much agree with the remarks that have been made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

We have to bear in mind that in the period since the end of the cold war there has been a proliferation in the world of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems. We have seen a dispersal of technology throughout the world and the ability to use that technology to develop chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. We just heard in the last few days about nuclear secrets leaking out of Pakistan. In just the last year or two we have seen the development of longer range two stage missile systems coming out of North Korea, not just for their own use but perhaps for sale to others, as has been their past practice.

If this trend continues it is quite conceivable that over the next few years we could see the launching of a long range ballistic missile against a city in North America, and one carrying a nuclear or some other kind of warhead on it. It could be a deliberate action or it could be an accidental situation. I would think if that were to occur nobody in this room or in this country would object to sending up a defensive missile to destroy the incoming missile before it destroyed the city it was aimed at. I cannot imagine anybody being opposed to that.

That is what we are talking about here today. That is what the issue is all about. We are talking about a defensive missile. A defensive missile does not have a warhead on it. It would be launched from land or sea and would hit the incoming missile at such a high speed in outer space that the missile would be destroyed before it could hit its target, killing a lot of people and damaging a lot of our cities.

There have been tests on this new system, and that has been pointed out. Some have been successful and some have failed, but there is no doubt that the technology is on its way to being perfected. The most recent tests have been more successful, even using decoys, which is a more sophisticated system.

The kind of system we are talking about is not star wars. It does not lead to an arm's race. It is entirely defensive. It does not lead us down the path either of the weaponization of outer space. It is completely a defensive response to an offensive weapon.

I do not believe we will see the Americans go the route of weapons in outer space, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs has said, certainly for quite a number of years. However, even if they ultimately did, there is no reason that we have to be with them. In fact, we should not be there with them on weaponization of outer space because we oppose it. It is clearly a policy of the government.

Supply

There are those who will say that if we go down the path of ballistic missile defence, it is a slippery slope leading to the weaponization of outer space. No, it is not. We clearly indicated in the war on terrorism that we would go to Afghanistan with our American allies but we did not go to Iraq. We made a decision that we felt was in our national interest. We went to one; we did not go to the other.

Similarly, we can support land and sea based defensive missiles but not weapons in outer space. Nor do we have to go with any substantial capital expenditure. The Americans have not asked us for that kind of assistance. They have already provided the capital costs in their budgeting for this system and, quite frankly, we could not afford it in any event. There could be some costs with respect to administration, such as operational issues or having additional personnel at Norad, but we should not be participating with any substantial capital costs.

People will ask about all the other terrorist threats, such as people bringing in anthrax in a suitcase or countries sending in a cruise missile, which is not a ballistic missile or the same kind of thing.

• (1105)

Yes, those possibilities are there, and yes, action, needs to be taken and has been taken since 9/11 to better protect against them, but that does not make a ballistic missile defence system any less valid. It is one of the possible threats that we could face.

If it sounds like this system is a *fait accompli*, in terms of the United States, it is. However it is not something that was invented by the Bush administration. I know the leader of the NDP likes to talk about it in that regard. In fact, it is the subject of legislation, the national missile defence act, that was passed in 1999 and signed into law by President Bill Clinton. The current president has said that he will implement it and that he will deploy a limited number of missiles in Alaska and California starting this fall.

I think there is a need to get on with this discussion with our American allies because if they are going to make decisions that affect the safety and security of the people of North America, then it is in the interests of Canada to be at the table. Being at the table, to me, as a former defence minister and one knowledgeable about this entity, involves Norad.

This joint agency between Canada and the United States has existed for over 40 years. It monitors anything that comes into the airspace of North America. It can detect aircraft, any object coming from space and incoming missiles. Originally it was designed to detect strategic bombers coming in over the North Pole from the Soviet Union as it existed in those days, but today it still plays a very important role in detecting anything happening in or over our continental airspace.

On September 11, 2001, Norad was vital. It quickly moved to protect our airspace. In fact, there was a Canadian general in the command position at the time of the disaster. Make no mistake about it, Canada does play a key role in Norad.

Norad can detect anything coming in but it only has jet fighters, like CF-18s, to respond to whatever comes in. Defensive missiles are a missing component of its capabilities.

Finally, we need to work this out in a Norad context. If we do not, then the Americans will be making these decisions on their own and we will be left standing outside the door. It will, I assure members, marginalize Norad. We cannot afford to have this happen. We need to be there. We need to be part of the information sharing, the consulting and the decision making process. This is in the interests of Canadians and it is in the interests of our safety and security.

• (1110)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I note that the former defence minister who just spoke has created the same impression, perhaps not with as much naiveté, but the same as what was created by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, that this is just about beginning a discussion of whether we might want to be involved in any way in this joint exercise with our American neighbours. At least he did not display the naiveté of saying that it is like sitting around a kitchen table and having a little talk about the possibility, which, unbelievably, the Minister of National Defence said.

Parliamentary rules prevent my characterizing the misrepresentations of the situations that are taking place here in the terms that Canadians would actually use, and I do not want to get myself in trouble with the Speaker. However what is really important is not to hear the characterizations flying back and forth across the floor, but for Canadians to come to their own conclusions about what the Minister of National Defence's letter, on behalf of the Canadian government and the Canadian people, actually says and actually means.

I want to very briefly play back for the member who just spoke and get his reaction on a brief quote from the actual letter. It is not suggesting that this is just a possibility of having a little discussion, but it makes it very clear that the letter is being written in support of two nations moving on an expedited basis to amend the Norad agreement to take into account Norad's contribution to the missile defence mission.

The letter goes on to say—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Order, please. The hon. member for York Centre.

Hon. Art Eggleton: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is good to define all of those things in the letter. As I said in my remarks, if this is going to be housed in any particular agency it should be Norad, which co-exists with the northern command of the United States. That clearly puts us at the table and puts us quite involved.

But the member is misinterpreting that letter when she suggests that the government has made a final decision. Obviously when the government has all the documentation in front of it, including a possible amended agreement with Norad, it can make a decision when it knows how the *i*'s are dotted and the *t*'s are crossed.

I frankly hope we will proceed with this, for the reasons that I have given. I think they are valid reasons in terms of the safety and security of Canadians. The government is not going to buy this thing and make a final decision until it has gone through these discussions. Obviously it wants to have it in detail.

I think that member would be the first one to criticize if the government came here and did not have all its *i's* dotted and *t's* crossed. The government is attempting to do that before the final decision is made and the House has every opportunity to give the kind of feedback that it feels represents what Canadians want or do not want in this case.

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear the former minister of defence make his comments.

I think about the need that our country has to have a secure defensive position and I am concerned that we are not even in a position to defend ourselves if we need to. For example, our Coast Guard has been starved. There is not even a capability of adequate search and rescue in some instances, let alone the kinds of patrols that are necessary. Our aerial patrols have been diminished over the years, all for lack of money.

I heard the former minister say that we do not have money for this, but perhaps we have some money for administration. It seems to me that if we are going to be a country with some strength even at the bargaining table we must have some strength in our defensive position. I am wondering why the government is not thinking about putting money into this—

• (1115)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Order, please. The hon. member for York Centre.

Hon. Art Eggleton: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my remarks, I am sure there will be some costs in this, certainly in terms of Norad personnel as part of the administration and operation of Norad's expanded role in all of this.

I do not believe that we should make any substantive capital cost contribution to ballistic missile defence. If that were the case, we could be looking at upwards of a billion dollars. We cannot afford that. I made that quite clear.

The Americans have not asked us for that and we cannot afford it. If we have an extra billion dollars, some of these other areas that the member talks about are where I would see investing it, although I must say in terms of search and rescue that when we got the new helicopters we certainly beefed up our operation there. When it comes to aerial patrols, we must remember that we do have other means now in radar and satellite opportunities.

There is no doubt that we need more money for the support of our defence operations, for the men and women who risk their lives for this country. If we had a billion dollars, I certainly could think of a lot of other areas that I would consider to be of higher priority, but we can still be with the Americans on our ballistic missile defence cooperation.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are here again today for the second time this week discussing this important issue. I am not sure it is the most important issue facing our country at this time, but at some time it will be and we need to have an open discussion on it in this country. I appreciate the opportunity to add my voice to this, but I cannot agree with the motion that has been proposed today by the member for Saint-Jean.

It states that:

Supply

...the government should oppose the proposed American antimissile defence shield and, therefore, cease all discussions with the Bush administration on possible Canadian participation.

I believe it would be absolutely wrong for us to back away from the discussions on this. We must have involvement. We are the northern half of this continent. Our closest neighbours, of course—and we are tied at the hip to these folks—are the Americans. Whether we like it or not, our geographic position in the world is unique. We need to realize that and cooperate with our neighbours when we are dealing with issues of defence. Whether it is our perimeter defence or defence against missiles coming in, it is something that we should be involved in. We should be at the table so we can have input. Clearly if we just walk away, then we will not have any say in what goes on.

I would like to mention that I will be splitting my time with the member for Surrey Central.

As I said, we are opposed to the motion that has been proposed today because we feel that we should stay involved at the table and that we need to have direct input into what is going to happen.

What this whole issue is based on is the fact that there is a possibility that rogue nations could develop the capability for long range missiles, and they could develop warheads, attach them and launch them.

The first order of business for a government is the security of its people. I think it would be negligent of any government not to look at the possibility of this happening and not to look at a method of stopping it from causing damage to our citizens and to our nations.

As for the issue of star wars and the weaponization of space, I think it is pretty clear from the discussions here today that weaponization of space is something that none of us agrees with and that it is not what is being proposed.

Star wars is the wrong label for this. It has been put on this to create support for some positions that have been taken by some parties in Canada. It is unfair that it is being put out there, because nowhere is it a possibility at this time.

I had an opportunity to visit Norad headquarters in Colorado. It was a learning experience for me. One of the things that I was very impressed with was the high regard of the American military for our people involved in Norad. As was mentioned by the former minister of defence, we had a Canadian running the Norad system in Cheyenne Mountain when the September 11 attacks occurred. That is how integrated we are and how high a level of participation we have in Norad. To me, it is critical that we stay there. They appreciate our organizational skills and they appreciate the intelligence of the people we have involved.

I do believe they are a little concerned with the kind of equipment we are able to offer and they would like to see something done there, but as far as our people, our ability and our knowledge are concerned, that is very good.

Supply

I do not believe anything that we saw was classified. We were shown what this system is going to look like. There was nothing in space. They are ground based and sea based interceptor missiles. A launched rogue missile will be able to be picked up by detectors that are not in outer space but on airplanes and in positions around the world. I think it was only 20 seconds after a missile was launched that they could tell where it was going by its trajectory and they could intercept it.

• (1120)

The Norad system that is in place was set up and positioned in Colorado because of the long range threat during the Cold War of missiles coming over the Arctic and into North America, but things have changed and now we have all kinds of different systems that we have to guard against.

The fact is that we are looking at nations such as North Korea, which is a threat, as well as others that could develop this and have reason to attack North America. We have to look at a system that will protect our territory. We have to be at the table when these discussions take place. We have to be there, contrary to what the motion says, to say that we do not want the weaponization of space, that we want the system to be ground based and sea based. If we are not there, then how can we criticize when it is finally developed?

Whether it is the present Bush administration or the Clinton administration before that, which started this process, we as a country and a nation have to stop dithering around and get past even the idea that we just want to be in part of the discussions. We have to go that extra step and become fully involved in this so we can have the ability to recommend or to oppose.

The system that was explained to us when we were in Colorado is as far removed from anything that could be classed as star wars as anything imaginable. It is ground based. It is going to be on land and on sea, but these missiles will not contain mass destruction warheads. There will be an interceptor missile strictly designed to take out a missile that is coming toward North America with a warhead on it.

There has been a lot of discussion across the country, I believe, but we have the results of the poll that was taken last summer. Seven out of ten Canadians favour us being involved in this at this point so that we are able to have input into what will be developed eventually.

With what is going on in our country today, with the scandals we are faced with regarding the misappropriation of funds and the misguided direction of the government, I do not understand why this would be the topic for today, but it is, so we are debating it.

When the time comes that there is a threat, which I do believe will be developed because there are nations working on being able to launch a warhead into North America, we have to be able to have some kind of defence against that. We cannot just sit aside and say, "Gee, that's too bad. They did it and we didn't expect it". We have to be able to act and we have to be able to act with force.

I want the government to take even the next step, to get fully engaged with our American neighbours on this and be a partner in it so that we can have direct input and offer what little we will be able to, because as we know our capabilities are slim. If we do not do that, we are doing a disservice to the safety of every Canadian across

this country. As I said before, the first matter of business for any government is the safety of its citizens. If we neglect to do this, then we are putting them in jeopardy in years to come.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's comments and I wonder if he knows that, in the United States, the organization responsible for the implementation of the space shield is the Missile Defence Agency

Whenever the Canadian government decides to sit at the table and discuss the issue, it will do so on the basis of a plan already prepared by the Missile Defence Agency. The first stages of that plan occur on land and sea with the famous Airborne aircraft, which will eventually be laser-equipped. The next two stages of the plan will happen later on; they involve the orbiting interceptors and the fleet of detection satellites.

I would like to know, and it must be very clear for him, if the member is aware of the fact that, when Canada sits at the table to talk about a plan, it will be discussing the plan prepared by the Missile Defence Agency? This plan provides for the weaponization of space. That is the issue they will be debating at the table; does my colleague agree with the weaponization of space?

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where the member is getting some of his information about laser guns on airplanes and issues like that. We are talking about a ground based and sea based defence system to knock out rogue, long range missiles with warheads on them that are aimed at North America. Surely if we do not get involved in this and have some input, we would do a huge disservice to all Canadians.

What happens in the future may happen in the future, but we have to deal with what is realistic right now. The plan right now is ground based and sea based defence. We are not talking about the weaponization of space. We are not talking about lasers on airplanes.

The member sometimes talked against his own motion. How will we ever be educated, involved or apprised of what is potentially going to happen if we are not at the table? It seems to me if we are to oppose any aspect of what will be proposed by the United States in this issue, then we have to be engaged. If we are not, we do not have input.

It amazes me that people cannot understand the fact that we will be able to stop this from progressing into space if it goes in a direction that we do not appreciate or want it to and it is not truly a total defence system and it becomes something else. Surely we want to be a full partner and we want to be able to express our opposition to that. If we turn our backs at this point in time on this whole thing and disengage ourselves from any more discussion, we will not have the opportunity to do that. For the life of me I do not understand why some members cannot get that aspect of the issue.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member made the comment that he cannot for the life of him understand why we cannot get it through our heads, why Canadians cannot get it through their heads that this has nothing to do with the weaponization of space.

I would like to read a quote to the member for his reaction. This is just one of many such quotes. This particular one is from the Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy, December 2003 and it reads as follows:

Rumsfeld's deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, confirmed the Bush administration's ambition to see weapons in space become part of its multitiered concept of missile defence: "While we have demonstrated that hit to kill works, as we look ahead we need to think about areas that would provide higher leverage, i.e., space". Nowhere is that more true than in space. Space offers attractive options not only for missile defence but for a broad range of interrelated civil and military missions. It truly is...the concepts and technologies for—

• (1130)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Order, please. The hon. member for Lethbridge.

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Speaker, I do not know exactly how to react to that. I just go back to the fact that what we are discussing and what has been proposed is a land based and sea based defence system. That is what has been discussed at the present time. We have to be at the table.

If the member is so concerned about that, why would she want to disengage in discussions with the Americans when we should be there to get those points across? If that is her position, how will we get them across if we are not fully engaged in the debate?

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Lethbridge for allowing me to share his time with him. He made excellent points and I would like to keep the ball rolling.

It is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the constituents of Surrey Central. Today it is to participate in the debate on the Bloc motion, which reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should oppose the proposed American anti-missile defence shield and, therefore, cease all discussions with the Bush administration on possible Canadian participation.

The Liberal government had eight years to decide its involvement in the U.S. missile defence system, but rather than deciding to have involvement in the program it has been putting off even launching the formal discussion.

In 1998 I had an opportunity to accompany the now foreign affairs minister to Washington, D.C. I had discussions with the assistant defense secretary in the Pentagon. I raised this issue there in 1998. The Americans would appreciate our getting involved in this program, at least in the discussions. It is going to be an issue that affects Canada.

After waiting for eight years, last month the defence minister wrote a formal letter to Donald Rumsfeld, his American counterpart. In it he said that Canada is ready to negotiate an agreement, a kind of framework for a memorandum of understanding on a ballistic missile defence system with the United States with the objective of including Canada as a participant in the current U.S. missile defence program and expanding and enhancing information exchange.

Ballistic missile defence, also known as national missile defence, is a cornerstone of the Bush administration's security policy. The Government of Canada confronts the difficult policy decision on whether or not to participate in the ballistic missile defence program. This decision will have serious implications for Canadian foreign

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policy and Canadian defence policy. It could be a decisive moment in charting the future of Canada-U.S. defence cooperation.

The idea of ballistic missile defence and the deployment of nuclear warheads on intercontinental ballistic missiles can be traced back to the 1960s. However, the deterrent effect of mutually assured destruction was deemed more stable than a world of offensive missiles and defensive missiles. In 1972 the United States and the Soviet Union signed the anti-ballistic missile treaty restricting the number of ABM systems either country could deploy to two, and later to one, at one site.

In 1983 U.S. President Ronald Reagan called on the U.S. to build a space based ballistic missile defence system that would protect the United States. The strategic defence initiative, also known as star wars by some misinformed people, was a research program designed to develop emerging technologies, including high intensity lasers and particle beams for ballistic missile interception.

Even as the cold war wound down and the Soviet Union collapsed, billions of dollars earmarked for missile defence were reduced to some extent but the funding was not eliminated. President Bush Sr. and President Clinton also continued to provide funding for missile defence. The result of the research and investment in the last 20 years will soon materialize into a missile defence system for the United States and perhaps the allies of the U.S.

In July 1998 a commission headed by then Republican Senator Donald H. Rumsfeld concluded that the threat was imminent and that the U.S. should develop and deploy a system as soon as possible to protect it against ballistic missile attack from countries such as North Korea, Iran, Russia and China, whether intentionally or accidentally, or even some rogue nations and terrorist organizations.

• (1135)

Almost on cue, in August 1998 North Korea tested a long range three stage version of its Taepo Dong I missile and later developed the Taepo Dong II, both capable of hitting North America. This prompted the Clinton administration to accelerate the ballistic missile defence system, aiming for deployment by 2005.

The proposed system is directed against a ballistic missile threat that many analysts expect to grow dramatically in the next 10 to 15 years as ballistic missile technology diffuses through the international system.

Construction is already underway in Alaska. Construction crews are busy at work at a former military base a mere 400 kilometres from Dawson City, Yukon. They are carving 25 metre deep holes for missile silos and are erecting about a dozen state of the art military command and support facilities. This will be the home of a vanguard force of rocket propelled interceptors for defending the United States against ballistic missile attack. Incoming warheads would be destroyed in their mid-course phase by exo-atmospheric kinetic kill missiles.

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The ballistic missile threat is real and requires a defence capability. Alternative policy responses such as strengthening the missile technology control regime, pre-emption and deterrence will prevent most threats. Some countries will defy arms control, build weapons and will be undeterrable. Arms control, deterrence, pre-emption and defence are complementary strategies, not alternative strategies. They have to work in combination with each other.

The U.S. government does not require the participation of the Government of Canada in order to deploy or operate the proposed ballistic missile defence system. No installations need to be built in Canada and the use of Canadian territory is not required by the proposed system architecture. The U.S. would prefer Canadian participation as it would provide a more comfortable political environment and would enable the United States to operate the system through Norad.

Canadian refusal will make little or no difference to the direction of the international security environment, the future of arms control or international perceptions of Canada. Canadian refusal will certainly not stop the deployment of BMD. However, a refusal to participate would sacrifice larger, more tangible interests that are at stake in any decision.

Although Canada may unlikely be a direct target of a ballistic missile attack, the proximity of most of the Canadian population to the United States and the poor accuracy of first generation intercontinental missiles mean that Canada shares largely the same threat as does the United States. We know that 90% of the Canadian population lives in very close proximity to the Canada-U.S. border, within a 100 kilometre range. It is a very serious threat and very serious concern for Canadians.

For states that have just developed ballistic missile capabilities, such as North Korea, it is extremely likely that their missiles are very inaccurate. Thus, the possibility of a warhead going astray and impacting on British Columbians or Albertans is quite possible. Do not forget that many people live in British Columbia and Yukon, in between Alaska and the mainland United States.

Even if there were no missiles anywhere targeted at Canada, even if the threat to Canada was non-existent, a nuclear explosion in the United States would have a serious and profound impact in Canada environmentally, economically, politically and militarily. If Canada refuses to participate, it would in effect strip Norad of many of its current capabilities and functions and we would not have access at the table to discuss future opportunities

• (1140)

Moreover, Canada has a history and its reputation is at stake. There could be serious consequences. We have 87% of our trade with the Americans. I will conclude by saying that Canada should participate. Even the polls are indicating that 70% of Canadians want Canada to participate.

Mr. Murray Calder (Dufferin—Peel—Wellington—Grey, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I want to make my position clear. I believe that we should be at the table. I believe that we have been a good participant in Norad before.

The issue keeps coming back, then, to the weaponization of space. I would like the hon. member to comment. It took us centuries to

establish the international law on the high seas. Today I see space as being very similar to the high seas. I know for a fact that the other countries of the world will not allow the United States to weaponize space without their acceptance. Would the member comment on what process he thinks we would go through to establish international law for outer space similar to what we have for the high seas?

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question.

For these very reasons he has mentioned I think it is evident and very important for Canada to be a partner. The government has wasted eight years.

I think the international community has to negotiate. We have to bring the world together rather than divide the world. At the same time, in the accomplishment of that objective, which is pre-emption or deterrence and preventing most of the threats, I believe an effective defence system is important. Canada could be a prominent component of that whole discussion or forum, but some of the actions we have taken, such as those on landmines or the International Criminal Court, have alienated our neighbours already.

Our participation in this particular national missile defence program, at least in discussions at this moment, will be very effective. This is one reason why I have been urging the government to do this. I did my part in 1998 when I was at the Pentagon. I did my part and the official opposition has done its part. It is this government that should take the initiative and carry on the discussion and the participation.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have brief questions for the hon. member who has just entered the debate.

The first relates to his reference to seven out of ten Canadians who support Canada's participation in missile defence. I wonder if I could ask him to shed some further light on this statistic. It was used the day before yesterday in debate by his defence critic, the former leader of his party. He undertook to table in the House the polls on the basis of which that assertion is made. He has still not done so two days later. I wonder if that could be clarified.

Second, I want to ask the hon. member whether he has any concern at all about the fact that there are repeated statements by President Bush himself, by Donald Rumsfeld, the U.S. secretary of defence, by the U.S. space command director, by Rumsfeld's deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, all of which clearly indicate that their multi-layered plans include the weaponization of space.

Does the member have a concern that the government keeps pretending that this is not the case? Would he not see there being more integrity in the position if the government said, "We know that weaponization of space is part of the plan, is the objective—"

• (1145)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Excuse me. I have to give an opportunity to the hon. member for Surrey Central to answer the question.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Mr. Speaker, first of all, about the poll showing that almost seven out of ten Canadians support Canada's participation in a missile defence system, I referred to that in my comments. It was the Pollara survey. It was done very recently, in November 2003, by Pollara. Therefore, that is clear.

The second point was about deterrence. This is the discussion that we hear. The hon. member referred to some comments. It is important that we develop a strong deterrent. We know that Taep'o-dong 1 and Taep'o-dong 2 missiles have already been tested by North Korea. This has already been done. We are already aware that China has ICBM technology, allegedly stolen from the U.S. It becomes quite evident that deterrence is logical. It is reasonable and real. We also know about the terrorist organizations. They may have nuclear bombs and all kinds of stuff.

The only solution that we can develop is strong deterrence. We can effect counterterrorism because we have the rogue states. One way to control rogue states is to have this program.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the obvious place for me to pick up is with the two questions that I put to the previous member, both of which were avoided or evaded in his answers.

On the issue of citing a poll that says seven out of ten Canadians support Canada's participation in Bush's missile defence, there was an undertaking by the member's foreign affairs critic that this poll would be tabled. It has not been done. We all know, first of all, that something that is as absolutely fundamentally important as this issue should surely not hinge on polls.

Secondly, the citing of polling information requires a full understanding of what the questions were and therefore what it was that Canadians expressed themselves on. So far there has been an extreme reluctance by the official opposition to table the poll, which the member for Okanagan—Coquihalla said he had in his possession and would table. I again would ask that the House be respected and the commitment that was made be actually carried out.

I want to go further today in the brief time available to me, because I intend to split my time with the hard-working member for Windsor West. I want to pursue two brief issues.

One of those issues is the steadfast refusal of the Liberal government in office and of the official opposition, the Conservative opposition, to acknowledge the extensive evidence, the overwhelming preponderance of evidence, that what we are here agreeing to become part of, to participate in, is indeed one stage in an intended process to lead to a militarization and a weaponization of space.

I want to further ensure that there is on the public record not the sugar-coating and, I would have to say, just misrepresentation about what is contained in the letter from our Canadian defence minister to the U.S. defence secretary.

I just want to make sure that Canadians understand what that letter actually says. It actually makes it clear, and I will quote: "the objective of including Canada as a participant in the current U.S. missile defence program...". It goes on to make it clear that this is intended to, and I quote: "help pave the way for increased

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government-to-government and industry-to-industry cooperation on missile defence...".

I do not know what purpose is served by the government sticking its head in the sand. Actually I do not believe it did stick its head in the sand; I want to take that back. Because if I thought it was sticking its head in the sand, then I would think that maybe it is not actually willing to look at the evidence. But I do not believe for a moment that it has not seen the evidence. That is why it is very difficult not to come to the conclusion that there is wilful misrepresentation of the facts taking place.

The facts speak for themselves when we read the letter that went from the minister of defence to Rumsfeld. If the letter itself was not cause for concern, what became an even greater cause for concern was the hypocrisy and the duplicity of the letter saying one thing, utterly devoid of a single reference to Canadian opposition to the weaponization or militarization of space, while the press release that the minister put out in a kind of afterthought and a footnote said, for the home crowd, "By the way, this is really what it seemed like, we are kind of opposed to weaponization of space but we are not putting it in the letter".

This has simply underscored the concerns of Canadians on this point. In case there is any possibility that anybody on the government side or the official opposition side, who absolutely share the same point of view here, is not in command of the research materials that are available, let me just say that there is no shortage of direct statements by George Bush, by Donald Rumsfeld, and by Paul Wolfowitz and others that make it clear that weaponization of space is part of what this is about.

• (1150)

It was not just Lloyd Axworthy, the former foreign affairs minister, it was not just the highly respected Order of Canada recipient, Nobel laureate John Polanyi, who appeared before the defence committee to say this is like climbing onto a conveyor belt to the weaponization of space. It is the very people in the U.S. administration who are making these decisions and who have not just acknowledged that, but have laid it out as part of their plan.

Let me just briefly quote from one such statement. Rumsfeld's deputy Paul Wolfowitz confirmed the Bush administration's ambitions to see weapons in space become part of its multi-layered concept of missile defence. Here is the quote:

...while we have demonstrated that hit-to-kill works, as we look ahead we need to think about areas that would provide higher leverage. Nowhere is that more true than in space. Space offers attractive options not only for missile defence but for a broad range of interrelated civil and military missions. It truly is the ultimate high ground.

We are exploring concepts and technologies for space-based intercepts.

I mentioned in debate the day before yesterday that my leader, who is doing tremendous work on this issue, and I had a day and a half in Washington last week. I noticed that the former defence minister stood up and said he did not know why the NDP is not willing to acknowledge that actually it was not George Bush who first signed on to the next stage of missile defence research; it was the Clinton administration in 1999.

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That is absolutely true. I have to say that I think it is one of the most worrisome things about what is going on here. There are courageous, far-sighted and peace-loving members of the Democratic Party who are in Congress and the Senate who support the position that Clinton took in 1999. There are also a great many who very much regret that this was done. Do members know why? Because the Bush administration has seized this fact of the limited agreement in 1999, providing for research around sea based and land based missile defence; it has been seized with glee, not surprisingly, by the Bush administration to say, "Let us get right back on track with our original plan, the Bush I plan, which did include weaponization of space".

What was very alarming was to hear the descriptions from U.S. Congress member after member with whom we met, as well as representatives of the NGOs, that it is like the case of the emperor who has no clothes. It is like a situation where everybody now knows that the notion of land based and sea based missile defence has not been properly tested. The limited testing that has been done has found it wanting. Most sophisticated scientists agree that it is not a system that would work, can work or will work. But we need to get through that stage, to put aside the normal testing requirements, which is what the Bush administration has done. It has abandoned the normal testing requirements so that it can ramp up and accelerate its commitment to go to the next layer of space based militarization. That is what is being acknowledged.

What disallows this government and the Conservative opposition from acknowledging this? Actually, Conservative opposition is more and more an oxymoron in this House, because we do not have a Conservative opposition to the Liberal government anymore. We have a conservative Liberal administration and a Conservative opposition that actually applauds and embraces most of the new and not so liberal conservative plans coming from the new Liberal government. That is what we have going on. But what is it that prevents them from acknowledging that this has more to do with the financial interests of the military-industrial complex? It has more to do with a militaristic approach to dominance of the world than it has to do with any defence from realistic threats.

• (1155)

Who is it that our government and the U.S. government are so convinced will launch sophisticated, highly expensive missiles on Canada for which this system will be the appropriate defence? Who is the threat? Who is the enemy? Who is causing us to become implicated in a system that could potentially, as estimated by a good many experts, cost as much in the end as \$1 trillion to escalate the arm's race, to make the world a less safe and secure place, and result in the weaponization of space, which both of those parties pretend to oppose?

If they actually do oppose weaponization of space, why do they not at least have the honesty, decency and integrity to say that they acknowledge it is about the weaponization of space, that there is evidence of it and that they agree to go to the table because they think it is terrifying and that they had better be there to fight against the implementation of the U.S. plans to weaponize space? That would be a position of some integrity.

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat alarmed when I hear comments such as the ones I just

heard. Historically we have always had shivers when the United States has talked about its need for isolation and to close its borders against other countries. Usually we are thinking in economic terms and the disaster it would be for Canada if the U.S. were to adopt that kind of isolationist policy again.

It seems to me that the two parties supporting the motion are advocating the same kind of isolationism for Canada in such an important area of our life, and that is the defence of our nation.

I cannot believe that they would say that we should not talk, that we should not meet and that we should have nothing to do with those people. That kind of thinking just isolates us and gives us no influence anywhere at all. I think that isolation should be damned from the beginning and I am prepared to stand with those who do it.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Speaker, I did not really hear a question there but I did hear a complete misrepresentation of what I said.

I actually said that it could be a position that could be defended. Now I would disagree with the position but at least it would be a position with some integrity and consistency and not involve being part of a big lie to say that we acknowledge that all the evidence shows that this is about moving to a multi-tiered, multi-layered system that includes the weaponization of space, which we find truly terrifying and we know Canadians are unalterably opposed to it, but we will go to the table to fight against it. That would be a position of integrity but that is not what we hear.

We have the defence minister who, on the one hand, sends a letter off to say that we want to co-operate and participate in this, and then he sends out a press release in which he says that we are opposed to the weaponization of space, by the way, but we did not say so in the letter. This is not a letter that says we are opposed to the weaponization of space and we want to be at the table to make our views known and fight with our last breath to oppose it from happening.

For the member to stand up and say, in the supposed Conservative opposition, exactly what we hear from the Liberal administration, is terrifying. It is very worrisome that there is no official opposition on this side of Parliament to say that the facts are being misrepresented, that the evidence is overwhelming, and that this is about heading toward the weaponization of space.

Yes, the figure given in debate the night before last on this issue, that only \$14 million was dedicated to research around the weaponization of space in last year's budget, is true, but they have refused to acknowledge that we should be very worried that \$3.3 billion is now budgeted to proceed with the research on the weaponization of space. This is not just for research. We are talking about moving to an implementation stage.

One of the things that concerns a great many people, who have an eye on what will happen to our children and our grandchildren in North America and around the world, is a defence minister saying that the NDP is being hysterical and scaremongering, and that, for heaven's sake, the plans for the weaponization of space are so far into the future, why would we be worrying about that today in 2004. I think it speaks volumes to the government's lack of vision to focus on a future that—

Supply

•(1200)

Mr. Philip Mayfield: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I must object to the member saying there is no official opposition. There is opposition and at this time we happen to be opposing her point of view.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): That is not a point of order, but the comment is registered.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Of course it is not a point of order, Madam Speaker, but I know we all try to find ways to make our points, and I am no different in that regard.

I must say something that is absolutely true. The member can object if he wants but he will have to present some evidence to support his point of view if he wants to win Canadians over to what the official opposition is doing on the issue of the weaponization of space. There is not one iota of opposition being expressed by the so-called official opposition, the Conservative opposition, to the fact that the government is on course to support and participate in a missile defence program that will move to its next stage and involve the weaponization of space. That is, in my view, deeply worrisome and extremely wrong-headed.

However the member cannot pretend that in regard to this issue, and a great many others as well, but we will not veer from the topic in this debate, that no effective opposition is coming from the Conservative so-called official opposition on this course of action on which the government is embarking. It was like a love affair between the Liberal government members and the so-called opposition Conservative members in the debate the other night. We are seeing it here again today.

Let me be fair. There are indeed, thank goodness, some members of that government who have the courage, the vision and the integrity to stand up and say that they oppose what the government is doing. Let me say again that it is a test of whether the new Prime Minister is being a complete hypocrite on the democratic deficit or not, based on a free vote on this issue when the vote takes place. If there were ever a case of where ensuring that members have a free vote over something as fundamental as the future security of the world and the possibility of the further escalation, not just of the arm's race, but of nuclear proliferation, it is surely the vote that—

•(1205)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Order, please. I would caution the member to use non-inflammatory language when referring to another member of Parliament. You are a longstanding member and you know you need to use respect. I would just ask you to do so.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Madam Speaker, I want to honour your intervention but I must tell you, and I say this in all sincerity, that I do not know how one expresses the behaviour that the government is exhibiting when the facts are one thing and what the Liberals are saying about the facts is something fundamentally different, other than to call it a misrepresentation of the truth or playing fast and loose with the truth. Maybe I need some help from the Speaker in finding the right language to describe that despicable behaviour.

I am not addressing an individual member when I say that they are playing fast and loose with the truth. I am saying that the government, the Minister of National Defence, the Prime Minister,

the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the former minister of defence are all playing fast and loose with the truth when they say that this is only about a discussion around a kitchen table, for heaven's sake, about whether we might participate in something in the future, when there is a letter that shows otherwise. The letter is the proof that they are playing fast and loose with the truth.

They say that this has nothing to do with the weaponization of space but evidence has been presented to them in this debate. I do not believe for a minute that have only received this information from the NDP over the last couple of days. They must have the evidence, and if they do not, that would be the most terrifying thing of all.

What do we call that other than being less than fully truthful? Maybe the Speaker could give some guidance on how one describes what is happening here that will in fact be within the rules of Parliament of civility in debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Resuming debate. The member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member for Halifax and myself are splitting time. I have not been allocated my time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): I have just verified that unfortunately the previous member did not split her time. Therefore, we will move forward to the next speaker who is the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, she specifically said that at the beginning of her statement. There is no doubt about it. *Hansard* will show that.

I have left a committee meeting to participate in this debate and there was specific mention to that at the very start of her speech. We proceeded to questions and answers after 10 minutes. If you check the time, I am sure that is what happened. Since there was no halting of the answer, it is not part of debate. Only 10 minutes of debate has transpired so far.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): I have checked with the clerks of the House and that is not their interpretation, but to ease the member's mind we will continue debate, going to the member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, and if in fact we find that there has been an error the member will be allowed to speak at a later point.

•(1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I speak today on the motion by the hon. member for Saint-Jean, a member of the Bloc Québécois, who has been doing excellent work on this file, on which I congratulate him.

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This is an issue that worries many Quebecers, all over Quebec. In my riding office, I have received many calls and e-mails. In the riding of Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier last week I launched a local campaign against the missile defence program the federal government wants to get involved in. People are calling me; they are talking to me; they are seeking a way to show their disagreement with the Bush government's missile defence shield that the Canadian federal government wants to join. For this reason I launched this campaign and it is already bearing fruit because I have received a number of postcards and petitions, which I will be presenting in the House later.

There are many good reasons to oppose the missile defence program. There are political, philosophical, economic and moral reasons. I will be discussing the following reason: the missile defence shield, as designed by the Bush government, is based on a faulty reading of the international geopolitical situation.

There is no conflict today between the countries of the West, or North America, and any other state, whether it be a superpower, a small or large power, or a rogue state. There is none. The conflict of today is between the open societies of the West—mainly, although there are others—and the angry men and women who are rising up against us, many of them from weakened, overthrown or broken states. They often come from the third world and from the Arab or Muslim world. I will come back to this later.

The defenders of the missile defence shield idea think that states, even rogue states, are so crazy and their leaders so out of touch with reality that they would be prepared to attack the United States or North America, even if such an attack would automatically and inevitably lead to their destruction. The idea that any leader, even of a so-called rogue state, could be crazy enough not to be dissuaded by such a threat of destruction, is in itself a completely crazy idea.

Who in this House would think that these leaders—whether of North Korea or other countries that have been mentioned in our debates—have stayed in power so long because they are suicidal fanatics? Is there anyone in this House who thinks, for example, that the family in power in North Korea has been leading that country for more than 50 years, because it has an instinct for survival? Of course it does.

•(1215)

Currently, there have not been any direct attacks on what I will call the West, for a lack of a better word, by a nation, a government or any entity claiming statehood, but rather very indirect attacks, often by terrorists and on easy civilian targets.

The proponents of the missile defence system seem to have forgotten that the main characteristic of these leaders of so-called rogue states is their survival instinct. They want to survive and, naturally, they want their regime to survive.

I was quite surprised to see that those in favour of the missile defence shield have not asked themselves the following question. If these leaders wanted to attack North America one day, why not do it now, before the shield is built and everything is in place? If they wanted to, they would do it before.

What is deterring these leaders or states, be they rogue states or not, is the knowledge that if they attack North America, the United States or Canada, with one or more missiles, their regime will not

survive. That is what is stopping them. The thing they want most in the world is to stay in power and to continue to rule over their society.

Consequently, saying that a rogue state might attack us to justify this insane multi-billion dollar investment is not a valid explanation of or justification for the missile defence program.

I challenge everyone who spoke in the House in support of the missile program to answer the question I asked earlier: If anyone wanted to launch a missile attack on us, why not just do it now, before the shield is in place.

The real threat is not from any state or regime. The primary threat for North America, the West, is groups or individuals who are disappointed or angry, often with regard to their own country's leaders.

In my opinion, this is especially true in the Middle East. The Middle East is a real powder keg and is producing masses of unemployed youth who have no future and often, unfortunately, no democratic outlet. They live in repressive regimes. These men and women, these angry and frustrated individuals, will never launch ballistic missiles on the United States, Canada or North America. But they may blow up a suitcase containing a weapon of mass destruction, in the middle of one of our major cities.

This terrifying possibility is becoming all too real with the rapid development of new technologies, like the Internet, that permit the ready dissemination of information on the manufacture of dangerous and easily produced weapons.

•(1220)

That is the threat we should be worrying about. The billions of dollars invested in this shield, the facilities throughout northern Canada, Greenland and North America, cannot stop individuals who have nothing to lose by launching another 9/11 attack, by hijacking a plane and dropping a nuclear bomb, dirty or otherwise, on Manhattan, Toronto or Montreal, or even using biological warfare.

The shield would never protect us against that kind of threat, which is, I think, far more pressing than that of missiles launched from another country.

So, what should we do? What should we do instead of—how should I put it—throwing billions of dollars out of the window? The best way to deal with these threats, with these unemployed youths who have no prospects, who have been so far disappointed by democracy and development in their countries, is to support these countries.

We should insist in very specific terms, using a carrot and a stick if need be, on democratization and true respect for human rights, the rule of the law and true equality between men and women.

We need to help these closed and totalitarian societies set in place democratic governments that are untainted by corruption, governments that would meet the needs of ordinary citizens instead of serving the interests of a small group of leaders who usually benefit from totalitarian regimes.

It is about helping societies cope with the new economic world order, which is led, among other things, by globalization.

It is about providing tangible assistance to these societies in restructuring their economies so that economic development benefits their entire populations, not just a few friends of the regime.

It is about opening respectful and understanding dialogue with these societies, particularly Arab countries where unfortunately we do not have enough ties with their leaders.

Far too often, we in the West have accepted the dictatorships in that region. Far too often, we have accepted totalitarian societies because it has served our economic interests. Far too often, we in the West have turned a blind eye to human rights abuse for the sake of oil, for instance.

Far too often, we have turned a blind eye to the development of totalitarian ideologies that are conducive to terrorist potentials, because this affected trade.

I will conclude by saying that a foreign policy based on our values—democracy, human rights, women's rights, peace, the rule of law—would allow us to eliminate the threat posed by these angry people.

We who live in a free and wealthy society owe it to those who do not have the fortune to live in a society like ours. In doing what I have suggested, instead of investing billions of dollars in an antimissile defence shield, we would be helping these societies and these countries and helping ourselves.

[*English*]

Mr. Julian Reed (Halton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I heard my hon. friend deliver a persuasive argument that totalitarian regimes are not likely to attack North America because of their self-interest, the interest in staying in power and keeping their people in subjugation and so on. That in itself would be a persuasive argument, if that were the only thing that we might be concerned about. However, what we are living in now, and I hope it comes to an end in my lifetime, is this age of active terrorism.

As we have found out to our horror, the terrorists who are active in the world are well financed. They have lots of money and lots of capability to do just about whatever they want to unless they are defended against. While I can agree with my friend that these regimes are more interested in self-preservation than risking physical annihilation, I would argue that there are other areas of concern.

As I said, they are well financed, access to technology does not seem to be a problem, and so on. The defence from missiles and that supposed threat which we hope never ever happens is a real one. Canada, being a close neighbour to the United States, should be at the table and should be working through Norad to have our voice in that debate.

Supply

● (1225)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question, and I thank him also for finally agreeing with me.

When we talk about terrorism, we are not talking about state terrorism. These angry groups and individuals are not acting on behalf of a particular state. They are members of al-Qaeda, Hamas, Jihad or other groups. The real danger is not that these groups will fire a missile from a particular state. Like the hon. member said, the real threat is that one of these groups with good financial means and technological expertise will bring a suitcase or drive a car full of explosives in the centre of a North American city.

This is the kind of threat we have to fend off. This is the real threat. The hon. member himself pointed it out, and he agrees with my premise. No antimissile defence could counter the threat of these angry groups and individuals. First, we must combat terrorism fiercely, of course, but we must also see to it that these young people who have no future, and no democracy, who live in totalitarian regimes—because that suits us and our economic interests—can live in democracies. Then they will have legitimate and acceptable means to express their feelings. These young men and women often live in repressive societies. By helping them, we will eliminate the threat against us.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his speech, because I think he went right to the heart of the issue when he talked about poverty and the breeding ground for terrorism. I want to ask him about the democratic deficit in the debate we are having.

Last week, the government House leader introduced a bill and a series of measures and said that we had to democratize the debates in the House of Commons. He said that, in Parliament, members should be more proactive and there should be more transparency.

In the debate that we are having regarding a major change to the foreign affairs and national defence policy, does he not find it surprising that we have to ask for opposition days with a votable motion to take a closer look at this issue, which so far has been the sole responsibility of a few officials at the foreign affairs and national defence departments?

● (1230)

Mr. Richard Marceau: Madam Speaker, indeed, I find it unfortunate that this debate had to be requested by the opposition. The government may boast about having had a take note debate on Tuesday, but no vote took place. The government should wake up. We want a vote. We are certainly prepared to debate this issue, but at some point these discussions must lead to a concrete measure, namely a vote.

Based on the position that I explained, it would be logical to be much more determined in our will to see all the countries of the world embrace democracy and to see them respect human rights. There is no moral relativism in this.

Supply

We must insist on the respect of human rights, on gender equality, on democracy and on the rule of law. We must show how democracy works. In a debate as important as this one on the geopolitical realignment of Canada's role, we must absolutely be exemplary in our democratic process by having debates in the House that lead to free votes.

I see that the former government House leader is smiling ironically, but I know that he is a great democrat. In any case, I hope he is an admirer of Churchill. We have few things in common, but at least we have that. Churchill was a great democrat who was never afraid to speak up, including against his own party—and he belonged to two different ones. In the thirties, when he was campaigning against Neville Chamberlain and his predecessor because the governments of his own party were in favour of appeasement, Churchill was opposed to that option and he spoke against it.

So, I hope that the former government House leader, who is an admirer of this great politician of the 20th century, will be able to promote the idea of a free vote, so that his colleagues around him will have the right to say, “I too am opposed to the antimissile defence shield, regardless of what the Minister of Foreign Affairs thinks, regardless of what the current Prime Minister—who is in the process of bringing his policy in line with that of the United States—thinks, because the overwhelming majority of Quebecers do not want this shield”.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): We will resume debate in a moment. I have some clarification for the member for Halifax. As the House knows, the Chair changed during her speech. I consulted with the clerks and they have said that three minutes into her speech she indicated that she would be splitting her time. Unfortunately, they missed that, but it has been corrected.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank you for the prompt action on the change. I appreciate it.

I would like to start my comments with an acknowledgement of the member for Halifax and her hard work on this file for the New Democratic Party, for Canadians and also for people abroad throughout the world. This is being debated throughout the world, as Canada considers entering into a national weapon defence and the weaponization of space with the United States.

It is important to note that our party has a former leader who has not only stayed on during a change in our leadership, but who also will be running in the upcoming election. He is doing a great job on files and the work in a very progressive way. We are happy to work within that environment. As well, it leads to a sound ability to put forth arguments on this side of the House which we feel are very necessary to debate.

Being part of a border community and having American relatives who are very much integrated in terms of social, cultural and employment exchanges at the border, we find that having a credible position that is sound, upfront and honest is the best way to negotiate and build our relationships with the United States.

As a member of Parliament, I have had a couple of instances that highlight the duplicity of the government on this matter. I was part of an all-party group that went to Washington. At that time, a Liberal member said to the Washington representatives that we would not join the Americans in the war in Iraq. Rather, we would go to Afghanistan and take care of that so the Americans could go into Iraq. The member said that we were really with the U.S. in spirit, in heart and in physical resources and by putting our people in Afghanistan, that was how we were helping with the U.S. on the war in Iraq.

That message was not well received. It was not open, honest and accountable in terms of the decision in the House of Commons, that we had dragged the government away from going to war.

Second, an Alliance member presented packages to American congressmen and senators. One thing which was said to a Republican congressman was that there were many people in Canada, including the official opposition, who wanted to go to war in Iraq with the Americans. The Republican congressman replied that he had voted against going to war.

That is important when we talk about this issue. The New Democrats have been painted as fearmongers, that we are the only ones speaking about the lack of clarity and, more important, commitment from the government to ensure that weaponization of space is not on the table.

The mere fact that the minister could not put that in his document, in terms of the agreement to go forward, was very disconcerting. We want to have a very clear understanding of what this will mean in our commitment from a research and development side to a personnel side, as well as a financial commitment.

It is dishonest to go to the table and say that we will not bring resources there or that we will not provide funding. That will not be very influential in developing United States-Canada relations.

Quite frankly, if we said to the American public that Canadians wanted to participate in national defence, in missiles and in the weaponization of space, but we were not willing to pay for it, the Americans would say overwhelmingly that Canadians should pay their fair share.

Part of this debate, in which there has been an attempt to sweep it under the carpet, is the mere fact that if we decide to take actions and so-called partnerships, we need to bring something to the table other than just our bodies. We have to come with something else.

I do not think Canadians buy the notion that it will cost us nothing. The reality is it will cost us financial resources. Otherwise we are saying to the U.S. that we want a free lunch. That will not be a very good strategy in building our relationships with those who either support or do not support this in the United States.

It is important to note the concept of the rogue state, that the issue is just between Canada and the United States and isolationism. It is not. It is about the world. Some of the rogue state arguments have been talked about by researchers, scientists as well as think tanks. One of them is the Cato Institute.

Supply

• (1235)

In a study done by the Cato Institute, one conclusion was:

Policymakers must examine closely the changing nature of the international security environment before making any decision to deploy a limited land-based NMD. Given the importance of political factors in the international security environment, policymakers must take into account recent changes in so-called rogue states. Looking only at the technical capabilities of those states is insufficient. Positive developments in the nations most likely to develop long-range missiles—North Korea, Iran, and even less-capable Iraq—should give the United States more time to develop and test an NMD system, which would be the most technologically challenging weapon ever built, to address only a narrow range of threats.

That is important because it looks at a narrow range of threats. We have to focus on these types of strategies alone and the cost of resources. We know that billions of dollars are required to ramp up this whole system. It will cost opportunities to work on world peace, poverty and diffusing other threats by ensuring that democracy flourishes in other nations that do not have them.

One of the criticisms that has come out about the New Democratic Party is that we are alone on this issue, that people around the world are not talking about this. I will point to a discussion on the BBC newswire and some of the comments related to the opinions of people on national defence as to whether it will lead to global peace or to an arm's race.

David Smart of the United States wrote:

The vast majority of responses are strongly opposed to the anti-missile system, and George Bush is being attacked for being out of touch with the times. Do not fear the USA is a democratic country, the majority of the people here share the same feelings as the rest of you, George will be voted out next time round. I am surprised that nobody has mentioned the Maginot Line or even Vietnam. Remember, the people of the USA are not stupid.

There are other examples.

A gentleman from Grand Rapids, Michigan, wrote:

Many of you have hit it on the head. The bottom line is that biological and chemical weapons are as much of a threat as nuclear weapons are. The real losers in this are going to be us, the American people, who will see our economy suffer over the next four years from erroneous government spending such as the missile defence program coupled with massive tax cuts. I didn't think it was possible but I think Bush might be even more clueless than Regan was.

There are comments from other places around the world, such as Germany and Kuwait and from many different individuals.

It is important to note that New Democrats believe in talking about this in an open and accountable way. We believe in looking at the possibilities. Once we start to explore and go down a certain road, it will take us to commitments. Those commitments are going to be financial, social and cultural. Those commitments are wrong with the way the government is handling this file. We need to be open and honest and accountable to all the possibilities to which this will lead us.

It is quite clear from the information coming from the United States that this will be the weaponization of space at the end of the day. That is why we should stay out of this. That is why we need to work on foreign policy that will be multinational and that works on progressive policies which will end these threats from the supposed rogue states. We can only come up with North Korea as an example. Very few others are thumbed as having specific abilities to target.

This is the wrong decision, and I am proud to stand on the side that is fighting this.

• (1240)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member of Parliament from the New Democratic Party and his comments about the motion before the House today, which basically states that the government should oppose the proposed American anti-missile defence shield and therefore cease all discussions with the Bush administration on possible Canadian participation.

I note he showed his true colours when he made the statement, and I think it is a direct quote from his remarks, that "Bush might be even more clueless than Regan was". He went on following that to talk about commitments. I would offer the following thought. What about the commitment of Parliament and all parliamentarians to the protection of Canadians? That is what we are talking about today.

The NDP is trying to confuse this issue by talking about star wars and what may or may not happen in the future. However, what we should be talking about, when we are talking about the missile defence shield, is the protection of North Americans by working in concert with our American allies, because despite the best efforts of the New Democratic Party, they still are, I hope, our allies. They are our best neighbour. Yes, we have a lot of problems with the Americans and different times we have to take strong stands with them on trade issues, but they are our ally and we should not make any mistake about that.

What about the commitment to protect Canadians?

I am in receipt, fresh off the news service, of a news story that the Russians have just completed a new weapon that they put into orbit in the last day or so. They have proved that this vehicle can get around the existing defences, can manoeuvre while it is in orbit and poses a serious threat not only to Americans but obviously to Canadians because of our close proximity to our neighbours.

In light of this new evidence that the member may or may not have seen, would the New Democratic Party want to reconsider its commitment to protect Canadians?

• (1245)

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to respond to that. First, the comments that I made related to George Bush and Ronald Reagan were not from myself. They were directly from a quote from a citizen of the United States from Grand Rapids, Michigan, so let us be clear about that. The issue we want to highlight is that even in the United States there is no solidarity of this issue. That is very important.

With specific reference to the Soviet Union, it is quite obvious what is happening. When Bush cancelled the anti-ballistic missile treaty and tore it up unilaterally, it sent the Soviet Union into a different level of discussions than it ever had before. Therefore, we see the escalation that will happen from this, and we hear this across the globe, not just from the Soviet Union but from other European nations and countries that are concerned about this escalation.

Supply

I want to point out that the member for Hamilton East the other night talked about the fact that we have embedded soldiers from the last war in Iraq. Therefore, once we started to get into this together, because we had Canadian soldiers serving during the last war in Iraq, we started to have this integration. We have to be honest with people.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me start by disagreeing profoundly with what I have just heard.

The hon. member who just spoke said the comments, comments that I thought were insulting toward the President of the United States, were justified because he was quoting someone else. In a country of three hundred million people south of us, we could probably find a quote on anything about anyone at any time. A critical mass will achieve that.

I do not think that is the point. The fact that the hon. member used those comments in support of his argument makes it equally insulting, and I as a member of Parliament, and hopefully the rest of us in the House, want to dissociate myself from that. That is the first thing.

[*Translation*]

I would like to continue with the debate on the opposition day motion.

I have heard in a previous speech, or was it during questions and comments, a member of the Bloc Québécois saying that they had to use an opposition day.

As a long time parliamentarian, I would like to say that I really have a problem with that. The use of an opposition day does not diminish in any way the House of Commons. In our parliamentary system, it is the duty of Parliament to challenge the government before approving the budget allocations. This is done through opposition days and at the end of the whole process, a vote is taken on the government's estimates and on the supply bill. The primary role of Parliament is to keep the government accountable before the allocations are approved.

I do not know why the member feels that such a motion would be of a lesser value coming from an opposition member. I was once an opposition member and I never thought that my motions were less valid than the ones coming from the other side of the House.

We are now discussing this motion presented by the Bloc Québécois, which says: "That, in the opinion of this House, the government should oppose the proposed American antimissile defence shield and, therefore, cease all discussions with the Bush administration on possible Canadian participation." I think it should have read President Bush.

It is a bit like asking a waiter if there is soup on the menu and having to eat it, whether we like the taste or not, which is totally illogical.

Allow me to elaborate a little bit more on this issue. Of course the government rejects the argument that discussions with the United States on cooperation in antimissile defence weakens Canada's commitment to promote the current international framework of non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament agreements.

As the defence minister pointed out in the letter of intent to Mr. Rumsfeld, which was partially read earlier today in the House, the government considers ballistic missile defence to be a complement to other international efforts toward non-proliferation and, of course, disarmament. It does not exclude such efforts.

A solid multilateral architecture in this sector is essential to Canada's security. Even if we do one thing, it does not mean we are unable to do the other. This is why our country is firmly committed to working toward the reduction of nuclear weapons and the elimination of other weapons of mass destruction. We talked about this in the Speech from the Throne. I could even provide you with several examples of Canadian initiatives.

I will show you that our reputation with regard to disarmament, peacekeeping and so on is well known.

In 2002, at the Kananaskis summit, under the leadership of our country, of our former prime minister, the G-8 countries launched the global partnership against the spread of weapons and materials of mass destruction. We did this with the other G-8 countries and with Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Poland and so on. All these countries invested \$20 billion in this partnership.

For its part, Canada will invest \$1 billion in this sector. Within the global partnership, Canada will invest \$33 million in the upgrading of one of Russia's main plants for the destruction of chemical weapons to help that country, which has far too many weapons, to safely eliminate an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction.

● (1250)

Canada has directed the work of the G-8 expert group on non-proliferation, which was involved in drafting principles to govern the measures to be taken to prevent chemical, biological, radiation-emitting and even nuclear weapons from falling into terrorist hands.

We have the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, or NPT, which is the legal and policy framework for Canada's international efforts around disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. Canada intends to pursue its efforts to bolster the integrity and viability of the NPT. We will continue to implement the principle of ongoing responsibility, which made it possible to prorogue the treaty indefinitely in 1995. As hon. members are already aware, Canada will be working in favour of increased transparency and responsibility in connection with the NPT.

As well, our country plays another lead role in the efforts to deal with certain countries' recent violations of the obligations set out in the NPT. More particularly, it is helping the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA, to gather information on the suspected existence of clandestine nuclear programs in North Korea, Iran, and elsewhere.

Canada's contribution, second ranking only to the United States, to the IAEA Action plan on nuclear safety, a new program which will make it possible to address a broad range of international issues relating to nuclear safety and security.

Canada also plays a vital role in all of the mechanisms governing exports of weapons of mass destruction, within the Nuclear Suppliers Group and several others. As well, we headed the Missile Technology Control Regime, the MTCR, from September 2001 to September 2002, which enabled us to promote international action against missile proliferation.

As hon. members can see, we are working against proliferation. Of course we want to see peace maintained, and we are contributing to the efforts to ensure that it is. I will go into this in further detail. Canada, and other like minded countries, given the concerns raised by the lack of a legally binding treaty setting out standards for non-proliferation of missiles and disarmament, have negotiated a code of conduct. That code is, moreover, one with strong political constraints. It is the first step toward the adoption of the instrument known as the international code of conduct against ballistic missile proliferation, known as the Hague Code of Conduct. This sets out a series of principles, transparency measures and other commitments relating to ballistic missiles. Since its inception in November 2002, 110 countries have signed on. This is a highly significant document.

Do I have to remind the members that the Canadian Landmine Fund was extended for the period from 2003 to 2008 with a \$72 million budget? One of the purposes of that fund is to promote the implementation of the Ottawa Convention. Why was it so named? Because it was an initiative sponsored by the honourable Lloyd Axworthy when he was our Minister of Foreign Affairs. The fund also helps with the destruction of mine stockpiles and mine clearing activities, and it provides assistance to victims.

● (1255)

When I was minister for international cooperation, I went to Croatia and I visited mine clearing sites. We saw those devices, which are so very small and cost so little to produce, but so much to get rid of. And I am not even talking about all the victims.

It is Canada which initiated the landmine destruction programs. As I said, I do not think our reputation is bad at all. We are the only country in the world to have taken part in all UN peacekeeping missions. This is no small feat.

As you know, I am president of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas and, a few days ago, I asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs what role Canada would play in bringing some sort of peace to Haiti. This is a completely different subject, but it is relevant just the same.

Of course, a few days later, the minister met his American counterpart in Washington. This is proof yet again that Canada is actively participating in peacekeeping.

Also in cooperation with the United States, Canada played a major role in the adoption, in November 2003, of the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War as an annex to the Convention on prohibition or restriction on the use of certain conventional weapons. This was another important initiative.

Let me now turn to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty. Of course, it is not in force yet. However, as we all know, Canada is aggressively promoting universal ratification of this treaty. Our foreign affairs minister recently wrote to his counterparts who have not yet ratified the protocol to urge them to do so.

Supply

This is another example of the work we are doing in this area. With suicide bombings having become unfortunately almost commonplace, the fight against biological warfare is at the top of Canada's priorities in terms of non-proliferation.

Our country is working to address the implementation and assessment deficiencies, which are the biggest flaw of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, in order to urge countries to pass national implementation legislation providing for penalties and more efficient export controls.

Canada is also supporting the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, another example of what we are doing. Of course, I have not given a complete list of the measures we have taken so far, but I think I have given the House some idea of the scope of Canada's contribution to non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament initiatives.

As I said earlier, this is not the issue now before the House. Canada's reputation is not at stake here, although some people have tried to question it today. Canada's track record is very positive, very good indeed.

Here is the situation that we are faced with. The United States has announced that it would begin the implementation of an antimissile defence system. As we all know, we are the United States' neighbour. We share the longest unprotected border in the world. We are the neighbours of the United States, which is just south of us. In fact, for some residents of Windsor, the United States is their neighbour to the south, the west and the north. The Americans are also neighbours to the west for some of us, and to the north for those Canadians who live along the Alaska border. So, they are our neighbours. Of course, north of Canada we have Russia.

● (1300)

I do not want to think that Russia is a threat. It is not, right now. But that is not the point. As the former Minister of National Defence said earlier, the idea is to take the necessary measures to protect ourselves without weaponizing space. We must protect ourselves against attacks on our country and on our southern neighbours or, at least, discuss this issue with them. And why not discuss it?

I totally disagree with the comments made by New Democrats, who said that we would probably disagree with the Americans. According to them, since we will probably disagree with our neighbours, it would be better not to talk to them at all. This is not very helpful in a dialogue. In my opinion, this attitude is totally unacceptable.

[*English*]

I think that we should be at the table with the Americans. I do not think I am naive that we can influence the process. Let us say that I am wrong on all those propositions. Does that mean that we could not walk out of it if we did not like it in the end? It is silly to think that we would have a conversation with the Americans and after having disagreed with them, if that were to be the result, that we could not move away from them.

Supply

We do have an independent foreign policy. We have proven that in the past. Surely the latest issue involving Iraq proved that our foreign policy is quite different. It does not mean that it is always different. That is equally ridiculous. Our views converge in many areas. They often do, but not all the time; nor should they.

One hon. member across seems to be suggesting that we should always disagree with them. That is fine and she is entitled to think that if that happens to be her position. I do not think it is.

We participate with the Americans in Norad. I do not know if the hon. member has ever been there. It is quite interesting. It has increased the security for both countries. Our participation with the Americans and several other countries in NATO has equally been of benefit, but that does not mean, for instance, that Canada has subscribed to other things the United States has done, such as the war in Iraq. We do not exactly espouse the Monroe doctrine either for that matter. We never have. It is not part of us.

We have our own values; the Americans have theirs. They are often, but certainly not always, similar. We should be trying to influence the process. Even if we were not their closest neighbour, our role as a peacemaker should mean that we should try to influence that process. The fact that we are their neighbour means that we should try even more.

I do not subscribe to the theory espoused earlier that it will likely fail, and therefore, we should not talk to the Americans. I do not believe that. I think we have a reasonable chance of being successful. If we do not try, I know very well that we will not be successful at much, because there will not be that kind of dialogue between us and them. It is the security potentially of our country that is at stake here as well.

Those are the reasons why I decided to intervene today, to make these remarks, and to say that I do not intend to support this motion. Whether or not it would be a free vote is immaterial to me. I do not think much of those things anyway. I do not espouse the view of the hon. member across and I will be voting in solidarity with members of the cabinet, because I think the government has the right approach to this.

• (1305)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was pleased to listen to the remarks by the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

I recognize that the North American missile defence shield and whether or not Canada participates and lends its expertise to the American efforts to create such a shield is an important issue. It is an important foreign policy and national security issue. There is no question of that.

I wonder if the member might comment on the fact that the Bloc Quebecois and the New Democratic Party in particular always seem quick to say that we do not spend enough time in this place discussing issues like child poverty, employment insurance, the high levels of taxation, and all the social policy issues.

In my case, I have not received one telephone call, one fax, or one snail mail letter on this issue. I have received a few e-mail letters, which are impossible to track as to where they came from. They may

be from downtown Toronto, or indeed they may be from my riding of Prince-George—Peace River.

However, other than the few e-mails, I have received very little correspondence in my riding office or my Ottawa office on this particular issue. Yet the House and the Bloc Quebecois are devoting a day of debate on this issue. Yes, it is important, but are there not more important issues out there that the House should be consumed?

I present that to the hon. member and ask, is Prince-George—Peace River an anomaly, is his riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell seized with this issue? Is he inundated with letters, phone calls and petitions demanding that he raise this issue of the distant potential for weaponization of space sometime in the future?

Hon. Don Boudria: Madam Speaker, I agree with some of the things the hon. member has raised, but not all of them.

If he is asking me if this is the hottest issue in my constituency right now, of course, it is not. The issues involving mad cow disease, the fear that the avian flu might potentially infect that sector of our agriculture in my riding, the future of a particular steel mill in my constituency, the issues involving the textile industry and how that is going right now, and the jobs related to those areas are definitely raised a lot more.

Issues involving the maintenance and protection of our official languages and their programs are very important to the constituents that I represent. They are two-thirds, by proportion, French speaking in a largely English speaking province that is Ontario. Those are very important issues in my constituency, as are other issues as well.

Having said that, I cannot fault the party across for having brought this issue for debate because, as I said initially in my speech, there is something sacred about that. I think it was wrong for a Bloc MP to denigrate the process of an opposition day, qualifying it as somewhat second rate, which one member did. I do not agree with that either. I think that it is first rate debate. However, in a parallel way, the Bloc has the right to introduce the subject and that is sacred.

Therefore, I must be consistent with my thought here. The Bloc is perfectly legitimate in having brought forth the subject. Maybe it is a big issue for the constituents of those who brought this motion forward, but not in my constituency, at least not that I know.

I note that one member across seems to be very enthusiastic to participate in the debate, no doubt she will get her chance later.

The issue is theirs to raise. In a way, I will be happy to vote on it because it will permit me to state where I stand. That being said, would I have chosen this as the hot topic from my riding today? No, definitely not.

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I cannot believe that a motion containing a few lines can be interpreted differently by everyone. The motion we have today is worthwhile. We said that the government did not take its responsibilities. There is a major change in the defence policy as well as in the foreign affairs policy. There has been almost no discussion, except for a discussion during a take-note debate this week, without any vote.

We submit that we should get some credit for raising an interesting issue. This issue is of major concern in Quebec. In the first part of my speech this morning, I said we are different in Quebec, the country where I am from, and we are glad we are different. We also think that the space defence shield is an important issue. This is my question for the member who just spoke. He talked about a whole series of lists, actions and conventions to limit, eliminate and control armaments. This is great. This is what the government is saying. This has been the government policy for decades, since Pearson, among others.

Now the government is talking about the space defence shield where we go to the weaponization of space. Now there is a breakdown. This is what we have been trying to say from the beginning. There is a major change. The member referred to Lloyd Axworthy earlier. Does he think that Lloyd Axworthy supports the space defence shield? I do not think so. Yet, he is the former foreign affairs minister. He thinks like us. I would like my colleague to comment on the statements I just made.

Hon. Don Boudria: Madam Speaker, first of all, the motion is worthwhile, but it is wrong. I cannot support it. Of course the member has the right to introduce it, and I have said so at the beginning of my speech. I thank him for his congratulatory remarks regarding the initiatives taken by Canada in all the peacekeeping roles.

I have a problem with the member saying that we are headed for a space shield.

First of all, I do not think that we have to decide to endorse the proposed initiative. Second, the issue of the space shield as he called it is not even on the agenda. The star wars that the member for Halifax is talking about are not even in the picture anymore. Just like the movie, it is long gone and forgotten. We are dealing with a completely different thing today. We are dealing with land or sea based measures to prevent states or dissident elements in certain states from attacking us with weapons of mass destruction. These measures should help us defend ourselves without us or the United States having to use nuclear weapons. We are not talking about something that would be based in space nor about weaponization of space. We have certainly not reached the “we are headed for” stage. I have not ordered anything on the menu yet. I have only asked the waiter if there was soup on offer.

• (1315)

[*English*]

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to refer, as the member opposite did, to the former foreign affairs minister, Lloyd Axworthy.

Supply

I am sure that the member is aware that the former minister is absolutely and totally opposed to the initiative that the government has now launched. I do not have time to quote extensively from the excellent report on “Canada and Ballistic Missile Defence”, issued by the institute which he has had the privilege to head up.

First, I how can he reconcile his favourable comments about the government's leadership and acknowledge Lloyd Axworthy on the peace and disarmament issues of the past, and the fact that he is absolutely condemning what the government is doing?

Second, he invoked Russia in his comments. Could the member indicate whether he is aware that Russia is in opposition to Canada's participation in the U.S. missile defence? Could he comment on that?

Hon. Don Boudria: Madam Speaker, as a matter of fact I do not believe I invoked Russia. I said that there was no danger for that country as we knew it at the present time. I believe those are the words that I said. I am not sure I would agree with what the hon. member is raising in that regard as that was not what I said.

Insofar as any other Canadian agreeing or disagreeing with my point of view, they are certainly entitled to do that.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Lloyd Axworthy.

Hon. Don Boudria: Yes, the hon. Lloyd Axworthy is certainly a great Canadian and one for whom I have a lot of respect. However, that does not mean that I agree with everything he says all the time.

I have quite a bit of respect for the hon. member across, even though she seems to think that people who disagree with her are wrong 100% of the time, especially after hearing her speech this morning.

That is not the way it is at all. We are all entitled to our opinion in this place. At the present time I am a member of Parliament and I am entitled to say what I believe is the right thing.

The critical mass of those opinions in this House influences the government in its decision. Then the votes that we exercise in the House collectively along with other things that happen in society generally are what makes our country move ahead.

[*Translation*]

We are above all a deliberative assembly. This is where we debate issues and this is where we express the wishes and the complaints of our constituents. However, it is important to recognize that we have a right to do so, even if it means that we disagree with a former member of this House, somebody who is not here anymore, even if it is somebody who is greatly respected, as is the case.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Madam Speaker, I had not planned on beginning my speech on the missile defence shield by saying what I am about to say, but I feel compelled to respond to the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, who gives credit to the government alone for the position it took on the war in Iraq and on landmines. I think that those who deserve to be congratulated are the people who took to the streets to make the government aware of their concerns about these important issues.

Supply

Members will remember that 150,000 people took to the streets in Montreal to protest against the war in Iraq. Even in my riding, 10,000 people took part in such protest. Therefore, it is the public that deserves credit for the foresight and prudence it has shown with regard to these issues.

The same thing goes for the missile defence shield. Certain members of this government say that people do not hear about this issue and that it is not their priority. We, in Quebec, sent a mailout to each family and each household to explain what the missile defence shield is and to inform them of Canada's unclear position on this issue. We received reply coupons. People told us that they were concerned and that they were saying no to this move toward a possible involvement in the missile defence shield.

I will remind members that the missile defence shield is a system of radar stations to detect enemy missiles, and of interceptors to destroy those missiles. In the long run, the American missile defence shield should include not only sea-based and land-based interceptor missiles, but also a fleet of satellites, orbital interceptors and an airborne laser-equipped aircraft.

We can see that it is a doctrine of total domination of space. We know full well that Quebecers do not buy into that logic. There is a strong culture of peace that has developed in Quebec over the years. We saw it in action when the time came to bring the government back on the right track when its position was unclear as to its willingness to get involved in the war against Iraq. We know that artists and cultural communities as well as ordinary citizens and their children took to the streets to say that they were totally against Canada's participation in a military intervention in Iraq.

So let me tell you that we have doubts. As far as the issue at hand is concerned, they would have us believe that it is all about discussions, but that it is not the case. The dice have been cast. We know that there are numerous items in the action plan and the development plan for the missile defence shield. Two of those items raise concern and make us think that the objective is really to occupy space. They are talking about a fleet of detection satellites, up to 24, and space-based interceptors, which could be in orbit in 2012.

Clearly they have a detailed and specific plan. Some people even say that, as technology evolves, other elements could be added with each new discovery. I think that, once the big machine starts rolling, it will be hard to stop. Therefore, we do not believe that we are still at the discussion stage. For many reasons we think they are well beyond discussion already.

The President of the United States, Mr. Bush, will not listen to some scientists who question this device which would be used to detect missiles coming from enemy states. This is an American folly, and they want us to be part of it, part of their propensity to arm themselves whenever they fear someone or something—Blacks, the enemy.

Quebeckers do not buy that rationale. For example, we could explain why we think the reason given is false, and that the government might already have signed an agreement in principle behind closed doors.

● (1320)

The plan makes this clear. It goes much further than what the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of National Defence are saying. The defence minister's letter goes far enough to make us react. I will quote excerpts:

We believe that our two nations should move on an expedited basis to amend the NORAD agreement to take into account NORAD's contribution to the missile defence mission.

This is a paradox. Supporters of this military initiative such as the minister argue that the cost of not joining the U.S. is the potential marginalization of Norad.

The Minister of National Defence knows what he is talking about when he promotes cooperation within NORAD. He cannot risk making such a proposal and not have it come through. That is why the Bloc Québécois has lots of doubts about the way talks should be interpreted. We think there may be an agreement in principle.

Allow me to quote the minister again.

It is our intent to negotiate in the coming months a Missile Defence Framework Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the United States with the objective of including Canada as a participant in the current U.S. missile defence program—

The operative words are obviously participant and current. We may therefore want to exercise caution and to call this government to order.

Before I continue, I would like to point out that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, who will have the opportunity to express his views on the missile defence shield.

We may doubt that the government is acting in good faith. As reported in an article published in *La Presse* on Wednesday, February 18, the remarks of lieutenant-general Rick Findley, who heads the Canadian section of NORAD, the North American Aerospace Defence Command, speak volumes about the government's intentions. These remarks go much further and the matter of discussions is pretext. He said:

I would not say that it is a done deal, added Mr. Findley yesterday. But it would seem to me that Canada is basically in favour of the initiative and intends to participate.

U.S. President Bush does not even want to listen to his fellow citizens. So, we are very concerned.

Canada claims to be very protective of its cultural sovereignty. To want to defend the antimissile defence project is not a good example of Canada's desire to protect its alleged cultural sovereignty. The government should clearly say no, we will not get involved in this.

Among those opposed to this project, are several government or former government members, including the leadership candidate who ran against the current Prime Minister and who said:

I see our country and I see our party as one that builds bridges. There are no shields strong enough to fight hate. What fights hate is the capacity to walk in another's shoes.

She was speaking against the antimissile defence shield.

Canadian Michael Moore produced a shock documentary on the tendency of Americans to want to arm themselves because they are afraid of being targeted and attacked. Indeed, the Americans have this propensity to buy guns to protect themselves from their neighbours.

• (1325)

In the opinion of Quebeckers, this is not a good way to send a message to the public. Why would we have so much against the Americans? Michael Moore provides several examples of how the Americans have interfered in the internal politics of other countries, where this led to the death of many women, children and men. For these reasons, we are opposed to the antimissile defence shield.

We will mobilize Quebeckers so that they too will know exactly what the Canadian government's intention to support the Americans and their antimissile shield project implies.

• (1330)

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, let me congratulate my colleague from Quebec for her very nice speech. She identified the major issue, that is whether Canada should get involved into such an endeavour. She mentioned some quite valid reasons.

Now I would like to draw her to another issue she did not touch on, because she only had ten minutes, that is the democratic deficit.

Here, last week, the government House leader introduced a number of measures that he would like members to adopt, that is more transparency and more involvement of members. In the issue now at hand, everything is done behind closed doors between a few individuals who are the officials of the Departments of Foreign Affairs and National Defence.

We, in the Bloc Québécois, to our credit, made this debate possible today. It seems to me that Canada is breaking with its foreign affairs policy in the missile defence shield project.

I would like to ask my colleague whether she shares my opinion a little about the fact that, with regard to the democratic deficit, the government introduces nice bills, has nice rhetoric, but does not take any specific and concrete action to correct it. It just missed an opportunity with the issue of the space defence shield.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Madam Speaker, this indeed would have been a great opportunity for the government and the current Prime Minister to show how prepared they are to have more open discussions about the issues they put on their agenda. During this debate on the antimissile defence shield, they could have opened the discussion and the whole process to the opposition parties.

Earlier, the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell listed all the measures Parliament has passed for peace and against anti-personnel mines and the war in Irak, but that is only because the opposition members joined forces and ensured that the government was heading in the right direction.

But here again, we have the issue of antimissile defence being discussed behind closed doors, by civil servants, and they would have us believe that we are still at the discussion stage.

Supply

The Bloc Québécois defended Quebec's interests and we knew full well that the people in Quebec were against the war in Irak. Had we not given some warnings to the opposition parties, the government would never have found out what our electors had to say. We keep saying that the party in office in Quebec, the Liberals, never tells the whole truth to the people. They just keep doing what they have done today all day long. They did not hear a thing. To defend the principle of peace is not their main goal where antimissile defence is concerned.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, there are some motions on which it is a true pleasure to speak in this House, and the motion before us today is one of those. I am very pleased that there is a debate on this issue and that the Bloc Québécois, once again, has caused the House to take a stand, expressed in a vote, on an important issue like this.

This is the second or third time, at least, that the Bloc Québécois has led the House to vote on things that the government would prefer to negotiate in private, without necessarily allowing a democratic debate.

Why am I so pleased to be debating this issue? Because the motion says, and I quote:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should oppose the proposed American antimissile defence shield and, therefore, cease all discussions with the Bush administration on possible Canadian participation.

The debate today in the House continues the line of action the Bloc Québécois has chosen, especially in educational institutions. The leader of the Bloc Québécois, the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, came to my riding and met students from the Cégep de La Pocatière and the Institut de technologies agricoles de La Pocatière.

We walked around with the postcard the Bloc Québécois is circulating, having discussions and debates with the young people in order to find out whether they are in favour of the missile defence shield. We saw all kinds of situations.

There are some young people who did not know exactly what it was. We explained it and after the explanation it was crystal clear that they did not want it. In fact, that goes against all approaches and all attitudes held by Quebeckers, in particular the youth who are pacifist by nature and want there to be no militarization of space. They are upset enough with militarization on land, at sea and in the air. They do not want the government's energy going to such a cause.

When we look at the estimated budget, we can say that their intuition is correct and relevant. We know that if we go along with this operation the way the current Minister of National Defence has, against the advice of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, in fundamental contradiction of the Canadian perception, the amounts of money needed will not be justified for Canada and not for the United States either, in my opinion.

The Americans will make a decision, but we do not have to go along with it. We want to say clearly in this House that the Parliament of Canada, through each of its members who in turn represent ridings, does not want Canada to participate in this effort to weaponize space.

Supply

We want there to be a public debate. We want to know all the angles before any commitments are made. Ultimately, for example after the next election, we want the current government—if re-elected—to continue, safe in the knowledge that it received a mandate to continue, as a result of that election.

The debate is clear. It will be made public based on the vote here, thanks to the Bloc Québécois' motion. The position of each member and each party of the House will be known. We will also see if this motion is important enough for this government to allow a free vote or if a gag order will be imposed. In short, that is what we are debating today.

Young people in colleges receive very concrete answers to their questions. What is the missile defence shield? It is a system that uses radar to detect enemy missiles and interceptors to destroy them.

People say that the American missile defence shield should include not only land-based and sea-based interceptors, but also a fleet of satellites and space-based interceptors orbiting the earth. There is also the Airborne Laser, a laser-equipped aircraft.

This is truly the second generation of star wars, introduced by President Regan and reinstated by the Bush administration. Today, the current Prime Minister and his administration are jumping on the bandwagon here in Canada, and this is unacceptable.

We will not support this type of initiative, because our priorities are elsewhere. We must consider the overall needs of our society. We must consider just the security needs in Quebec and Canada. The money needs to be invested elsewhere than in the missile defence shield.

If we must do anything, it is ensure adequate internal security. We must ensure that our ports are well equipped when ships arrive. We must ensure that our airports are well equipped, and that we have a relationship with other countries allowing us to reduce the obstacles in our path, and that we help reduce the number of terrorists by ensuring better distribution of wealth.

• (1335)

If, unfortunately, the situation continues, we need good tools to deal with it. In my opinion, the missile defence shield is not the way to go. Besides, the program is not quite up to scratch yet.

I find very risky the position of the current defence minister, who wrote to his American counterpart, saying that Canada will get on board, move forward with the proposal and work shoulder to shoulder with the U.S., when we are not clear on how far this is going to go.

The cost of this program has already been estimated at \$60 billion. Internationally, many countries such as China, Russia and European Union countries have expressed serious concerns.

Everyone applauded when Canada went ahead and patented drugs to combat diseases in developing countries, some of the poorest on the planet. Let us go ahead, take the lead on this issue and make sure that we have the best legislation possible.

Conversely, in the present case, there is no logic in the Government of Canada getting involved right away in the deployment of the missile defence shield. In this respect, I would

like to remind the House of the public outcry last year about the war in Iraq. Action is not required as urgently in this instance. There is no reason to believe that, tomorrow, people will die for reasons that will turn out to be false. Still, we are confronted to a similar situation where public opinion must be mobilized.

That is what the Bloc Québécois has set out to do, through this debate in the House today, the postcard writing campaign we have launched and the tour on which the hon. member for Saint-Jean has gone. Together, all these measures will help demonstrate to this government that the people of Quebec are behind us on this as they were on the war in Iraq and do not want Canada to invest in such an initiative. We pray that the other side will listen carefully and that this matter can be resolved before the election.

If an election were called and there were common viewpoints, this would be a major election issue, especially if the government maintained its wishy-washy position with hawks like the Minister of Defence who push ahead and would like Canada to join the process. Yesterday, we heard a career military officer—someone with long experience who worked in the relevant agencies—say it was a done deal.

Let me say that, for the members of the Bloc Québécois, the people of Quebec and all the young people in our schools, this is not a done deal and we will make sure it never is. The Government of Canada absolutely should not go any further with this. If we cannot stop the steamroller with the current debate in this House, then we will stop it during the election. I am certain that, when they tour the schools, Liberal candidates will face many questions. They will be asked whether they voted in favour of Canada participating in the missile defence system. They will each have to answer that question. I hope it becomes a major issue.

Young people increasingly feel like citizens of the world. They feel it is very important for developed nations like Quebec, Canada and North America to take their international responsibilities. Pushing ahead with the missile defence shield is not the way to go. We have many other priorities and people who want the military to be better equipped agree. Comments are coming in from everywhere, including the military. Clearly, there are other priorities. Other equipment is needed.

Of all the choices that have to be made in Canada, as the Bloc Québécois says in its postcard campaign, it is important to say no to the missile defence shield and no to the weaponization of space.

• (1340)

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, first I want to congratulate my colleague who is, in my opinion, a very persuasive parliamentarian.

I started out this morning by saying that we in Quebec are different from the rest of Canada. I even described Quebecers as warriors for peace. Since the beginning of this debate, this morning, I have been listening to colleagues, who are unfortunately not from our party, tell us that they are wondering why this issue was raised when there are so many other important issues.

I know that my colleague is also involved with young people since he is working with the comité jeunesse of the Bloc Québécois. I would like him to tell us how Quebecers are reacting to an attempt at weaponizing space such as this one.

Mr. Paul Crête: Madam Speaker, I think the best response I can give the hon. member is to describe a meeting at Café La Tasse, a student coffee shop at the la Pocatière Cegep. The leader of the Bloc Québécois and myself met with about twenty students, and the topic of discussion was the reality of the missile defence shield.

The students who participate in café activities are generally greatly concerned about the environment and ecological issues. They believe our responsibility on this planet is to ensure that our planet is at peace. This is an attitude that I imagine young people everywhere must share. Quebec, however, has its own particular outlook on things.

This was obvious last year in connection with the war in Iraq, and the reaction is the same now. When people tell us this is not an important issue, we need to remind them that it will shape the lives of the twenty-somethings of today. When they turn 40, they will have to live with the results of this weaponization of space, and that is not the future they want.

There is a general desire, I believe, to make sure that the escalating violence we are seeing in this world is halted. People do not believe that problems are solved by putting up barriers everywhere and arming heavily. Our young people want to see an openness to the world, they want to be able to tell others who they are, and learn the same from them. They want to see a return to a policy and a dynamic of peace, rather than a dynamic of escalating violence.

That was the message we got from these young people. We are hearing the same thing daily, and will continue to do so. I am sure the member for Saint-Jean will receive thousands of postcards from all over Quebec telling him that people want nothing to do with the missile defence shield of Mr. Bush and the present Prime Minister, and that they are opposed to the weaponization of space.

• (1345)

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Canada-U.S.), Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is with pleasure today that I rise to speak to the issue of ballistic missile defence, or BMD, and Canada's ongoing discussions with the United States on that important issue. This is a great opportunity to address the facts and to dismiss some of the inaccuracies or myths.

As everyone is aware, on January 15 the Minister of National Defence and the U.S. Secretary of Defense exchanged letters of intent on BMD. These letters will permit Canada to pursue negotiations with the United States and allow us to help shape those plans for the future. This is crucial for Canada to consider. Any decision made on behalf of Canadians by the Canadian government

Supply

on Canada's participation in BMD will be based on the fundamental question of whether or not it is in Canada's national interest.

Before I go any further, Madam Speaker, I want to split my time with the hon. member for Ottawa West—Nepean.

Despite the fact that Canadians would overwhelmingly support the notion of increasing and improving Canadian security and the ability to protect Canadians against security threats, there are some who would want to actually keep Canadians in the dark. In some cases there are some who would present and disseminate information which was really misinformation and was not accurate.

If we are going to have a legitimate debate on such an important issue, we need to deal with facts. I am going to point out some of the myths that are out there.

First of all, missile defence and the proposal we are speaking of is land and sea based missile defence. This is not star wars. Star wars is a 1980s term, like Ed Broadbent. We should be dealing with the fact that we are talking about land and sea based missile defence. This is far more limited in scope than the discussions in the 1980s around the weaponization of space.

At that time the Canadian government decided it was not in Canada's national interest to participate for two reasons. It was not in Canada's national interest to pursue a policy of weaponization of space which was the proposal then. Also, it was a very different environment than that which exists today in a post-cold war environment.

It is key for us to recognize that the U.S. intention is to have up to 20 interceptors in place by 2005 and this system will not employ weapons in space. Some military planners in the U.S. have drafted vision documents discussing options in the future. These are not policy; they discuss options well into the future.

Given the fact that the Canadian position is to oppose the weaponization of space, it is important that the Canadian position be represented at the table and down the road when the discussions occur. Then we can make that case in a vigorous and meaningful way as opposed to being shut out of those discussions by some sort of pre-emptive fear of what future discussions could be.

One of the issues that is raised is that participating in these discussions somehow represents a threat to Canadian sovereignty. I would argue that when the Canadian government has an opportunity to increase and protect the security of Canadians, if it chooses not to do so, that in fact is a threat to Canadian sovereignty. Any government that fails to take every possible action to defend the security of its own people is failing to defend the sovereignty of its own people.

A fundamental principle of protecting sovereignty involves first and foremost defending security. We have a 50 year history of working with the U.S. to defend North American security. Norad is an essential part of that. Therefore, this is nothing new, to continue those discussions and continue that level of engagement.

Supply

● (1350)

Myth number two is that we cannot afford participation. The fact is that Canada has not yet been asked to contribute anything financially. One of the goals of the negotiations is to determine what participation would cost. Clearly the government will not participate or commit to something that we as a government cannot afford. There is no essential need and in fact there is discussion now that there probably will be no need for direct Canadian financial contribution. However, we should, as a country, be willing to participate in North American defence which among other things protects the lives of Canadians.

Most Canadians understand that when it is explained in those terms, particularly in a post-cold war environment where the nature of the threat is so different than it was. The unpredictability of threat is so significant compared to a cold war period. Most Canadians agree that it makes a great deal of sense to participate as part of North America, as part of Norad to defend the security of Canadians.

Myth number three is that a new arms race will start as a result of ballistic missile defence. To the contrary, the ability to protect against ballistic missile attack in North America, if anything, could actually reduce the degree to which rogue nations or terrorist states would want to pursue a ballistic missile strategy against North America. Why would they want to pursue that line of weaponization or contribute to that arms race if we, as part of Norad and in working with the U.S., were taking action through ballistic missile defence to protect ourselves against that? To the contrary, ballistic missile defence has the capacity to reduce the incentive for an arms race based on ballistic missiles. This is purely a limited and defensive response as opposed to something that could in any way, shape or form contribute to or feed an arms race.

Canada remains committed to stopping the spread of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction. We have a strong history internationally of effecting change through multilateralism and working with the United States and countries around the world to achieve that. This certainly does not impact negatively. Canada is continuing to play an important role in reducing the spread of ballistic missiles.

Myth number four is that our security will not be heightened. Does anybody in the House, even the opponents of BMD, actually believe that the Government of Canada would be engaged in a discussion and would agree to support ballistic missile defence if it did not believe absolutely and unequivocally that it would protect the security of Canadians? Why else would we do it?

There is a strong recognition that the primary reason for entering into negotiations with the U.S. on this is to determine how BMD can protect the security of Canadians. We are not pursuing these discussions simply to mollify the Americans. We are pursuing these discussions to protect the security and the lives of Canadians first and foremost. That is the principal goal of this. Particularly in a post-September 11 environment, the principal goal of a lot of our joint initiatives with the United States on security issues has been based first and foremost on the goal of protecting the lives and security of Canadians.

Our participation and support of BMD at the end of the day will be determined and based on national interest which will be focused on the principal question of whether or not this participation will help defend the security of Canadians and protect the lives of Canadians. Clearly this proposal, BMD, has the capacity to defend and protect the security of Canadians.

● (1355)

The whole notion that defending ourselves from ballistic missiles is somehow un-Canadian is nonsensical. I think most Canadians want to defend Canadian sovereignty and the best way to defend sovereignty is to actually participate in a meaningful way in protecting Canadian security.

Our objective as a government and as a country is to protect Canadian and North American security, whether that means investing in our military, participating in multilateral efforts or in BMD, among other things, and to defend Canadian sovereignty. It will not weaken it.

I would argue as well—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): Questions and comments. The member for Prince George—Peace River.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a quick reference question for the member for Kings—Hants. I want to read something from *Hansard* of Monday, April 15, 2002, and then ask him a question.

In referring to the \$100 million that was blown by the Liberal government to purchase two Challenger jets, the member asked:

Will the Prime Minister return to Earth, cancel the order for the flying Taj Mahals and put the money toward our troops that need it or has the little guy from Shawinigan truly become the sultan of Shawinigan?

He was referring, of course, to former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien.

Does he still feel the same way? Will he now refer to the current Prime Minister when he flies in his luxury jet as the shipping magnate from Montreal?

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, I am not quite certain what relevance that has to ballistic missile defence, but the fact is that the decision, as the Prime Minister responded to the question in the House of Commons, was made outside of the ordinary cabinet procedures. At that time he also was not part of the decision making process that led to the purchase of those jets.

If the hon. member were interested in talking about the issues on which we actually share a commonality of interest, for instance the ballistic missile defence, he could contribute positively to this debate and find common ground.

He, as an hon. member, has probably said more things about some of his colleagues in the House of Commons, with whom he now shares a caucus, members of the former Progressive Conservative Party, than anything I could have said about the party within—

•(1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Hinton): The member will have approximately three minutes following question period. It is now time for statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

WEB AWARENESS DAY

Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the House that today is Web Awareness Day.

Initiated by the Canadian Library Association, the Media Awareness Network and Bell Canada, Web Awareness Day seeks to make parents aware of the resources available at their local libraries to help young Canadians develop their Internet literacy skills.

The Internet plays a large role in the lives of Canadian children. Understanding how to manage their online time into the best possible experience for them is a difficult job for parents. Our libraries are doing their utmost to connect parents with the best resources and information.

Under the theme “Parenting the Net Generation”, public libraries will use Web Awareness Day as a positive opportunity to deliver the message that they are ready to support parents and communities in teaching young Canadians literacy skills for the 21st century.

We thank public libraries for their great efforts and wish them success with Web Awareness Day.

* * *

MIDDLE EAST

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday the member for London—Fanshawe made a statement in the House. I was shocked by the insensitive and inflammatory remarks about the security wall being constructed in Israel.

I am certain most Israelis would agree to dismantle that wall in a heartbeat if the reign of terror and carnage inflicted on its citizens were halted.

The sad reality is that the Palestinian leadership has shown no will, no ability to stop suicide bombers or to prevent the glorification of those who perpetrate such vile acts as martyrs and as heroes.

Israel has a primary responsibility, like as any nation, to protect the person and security of its citizens.

To use accusatory and inflammatory words to characterize Israel's defence is to display gross ignorance of the geopolitical reality and the history of this troubled region.

Those who live in relative peace and security should not be quick to judge those who live in constant peril and with terror.

To accuse Israelis of constructing concentration camps is a cruel and unwarranted slur against all Jewish people and the memory of

S. O. 31

millions who perished in what remains the world's most infamous genocide.

* * *

SCOUT-GUIDE WEEK

Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is Scout-Guide Week which takes place February 15 to 22.

This is the time of celebration for Scouts Canada and Girl Guides of Canada. It is a chance for the public to recognize the limitless potential of Canadian youth and the work that scouting does to help build a better world for our nation's future leaders.

[Translation]

Scouting is an activity that instils fundamental principles such as leadership, pride and honour in more than 120,000 young boys and girls.

Moreover, these programs and activities are made possible through the commitment and dedication of some 40,000 volunteers working within the scouting movement.

[English]

I would encourage all members to join me in wishing both Scouts Canada and Girl Guides of Canada continued success as they move forward.

* * *

[Translation]

HEART MONTH

Mr. Jeannot Castonguay (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February is Heart Month and it is with great pleasure that I rise today to acknowledge this occasion.

Slightly larger than a fist, the human heart contracts 100,000 times a day and pumps roughly 8,000 litres of blood daily. In a lifetime, the heart beats an average of 2.5 billion times.

Learning more about the heart and conducting research can greatly help people with heart disease.

Healthy living is achieved in many ways, such as eating well, being physically active and quitting smoking. A combination of these good habits will provide a fuller and longer life and could reduce the incidence of heart disease.

As part of Heart Month, I encourage Canadians to take action to stay healthy. I invite Canadians to celebrate Heart Month and become aware of the importance of leading a healthy life all year long.

*S. O. 31**[English]***EXPORT AWARD OF DISTINCTION**

Hon. David Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Western Economic Diversification presented the Export Award of Distinction to BioWare of Edmonton.

BioWare develops advanced technology for video and computer games. It has received over 37 Game of the Year awards for its internationally acclaimed products.

Lucasfilms, Microsoft and other producers have chosen this company as their partner for international projects.

Since 1995, BioWare has sold more than 8 million software units in over 40 countries. Exports make up about 98% of BioWare's sales; last year alone accounting for about \$13 million.

The 21st century economy is an economy open to the world. Western Canadian companies like BioWare are leading the way.

* * *

●(1405)

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay—Boundary—Okanagan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claims that as the former finance minister he knew nothing about the advertising scandal. That is a red herring. At least two years ago every MP in the House knew, so obviously he knew as well.

The real question is not whether he knew but rather why, as the finance minister, he did nothing about it. As finance minister he cut funding to health care, defence, the justice system, training, education, all areas important to Canadians.

Why then, as the government's key financial man, did he not do anything to curb the scandalous skimming of funds through the Liberals' money laundering advertising scheme?

In December the billion dollar firearms registry was forecasted to cost \$113 million for the fiscal year ending March 31. The Prime Minister introduced changes to cut costs and now the firearms registry is \$20 million over budget. The government temporarily suspended funding but the program kept on spending.

If the Prime Minister is not as guilty as anyone in this money laundering and kickback scheme, then at a minimum he is the most incompetent money handler and leader this country has ever had.

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MIDDLE EAST

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too want to speak today to the misleading statement of the member for London—Fanshawe which depicted the Israeli security barrier as a provocative measure against the Palestinian people.

Canadians should remember that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a dispute between two peoples with a legitimate claim to the same land where the Palestinians remain unwilling to abandon the strategy of terror and accept Israel's right to exist.

Without a peace partner, Israel is forced to protect its people unilaterally.

In the past three and a half years Israel has intercepted 313 attempted homicide bombers. Nonetheless, more than 130 others were able to maim and kill innocent Israeli civilians.

It is unfortunate that Israel has to contemplate this barrier, however, a similar security perimeter has stopped all suicide attacks from the Gaza Strip.

The Canadian government correctly objected to the politicization of the barrier in the International Court of Justice.

The Israeli government continues to make every effort to minimize the barrier's impact on Palestinians. However a tide of suicide bombers continues. Israel does not have a choice.

* * *

*[Translation]***ARTS AND CULTURE**

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this year, 14,435 authors in Quebec and Canada will be hit with a 15% decrease in their public lending right earnings. The public lending right is an amount paid to authors in recognition of the presence and use of their books in public and university libraries. The decrease is the result of the \$631,000 budget cut made by the Canada Council for the Arts.

This program is a tangible form of appreciation and celebration of the creative and intellectual contributions of authors and for a good number of them, some support as well.

I will borrow the words of one author who said, "The poor writers and poets receive their public lending right cheque with relief and for one day, they can have steak and fries instead of peanut butter".

Considering the growing number of new authors, every year more money—at least \$500,000—should be added to the program, and not taken away as it happened this year. This is a good example of where the \$100 million wasted on sponsorships could have gone: to provide money to artists.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Claude Duplain (Portneuf, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 18, 2004, KPMG released the results of their latest study of international business costs. The annual KPMG study is the world's largest objective comparison of operating costs in the G-7.

In this year's version, for the fifth consecutive time, Canada was ranked the lowest-cost country in which to do business. The Minister of International Trade and his colleague the Minister of Industry welcomed these results yesterday at simultaneous press conferences in Montreal and Toronto.

The KPMG study is clearly good news for our economy and our communities. The results show that our country is well positioned to build a 21st century economy that will be a global magnet for capital, creative entrepreneurs and innovative ideas.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is much concern in my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador surrounding the recent decision of the Quebec Court of Appeal regarding maternity, parental and sick benefits through the EI program.

The ruling claimed that these were matters of provincial jurisdiction and that the federal government had no right to ensure that all Canadians receive equal access to these benefits.

There are also concerns that the government is considering carving up the EI moneys to cover the cost of these benefits which would ensure the poorer provinces, like Newfoundland and Labrador, will be hit hardest as a result.

Canadians everywhere understand the federal government has a crucial role to play in maintaining national standards and the national program in order to prevent balkanization of the EI program.

If the Quebec ruling stands, it will set a dangerous precedent and will eliminate the current standards that exist with respect to special benefits.

I therefore urge the government to do the right thing and immediately appeal the ruling of the Quebec Court of Appeal.

* * *

•(1410)

HOOPS UNLIMITED

Mr. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to report that this evening in my riding of Etobicoke North we are celebrating an organization called Hoops Unlimited.

Hoops Unlimited is a program that has young people playing basketball: young people who might otherwise be attracted to gangs, violence and drugs. This program is working very effectively to give young people an alternative to those types of activities, an alternative where they get together, where they have healthy minds and healthy bodies, and where they stay away from those other alternatives that are destabilizing our community and causing a lot of grief for our citizens.

We want to have safer streets. We want to have citizens feeling that they can walk around safely in the city of Toronto, and this program is helping to achieve that objective. I applaud their efforts and wish to congratulate them for their event this evening.

* * *

ST. CLAIR RIVER

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, two days ago another chemical spill was reported in the St. Clair River, the second in less than a month. There also was a major spill

S. O. 31

in the spring of 2003. It has forced water intake pipes shut and, once again, the communities along the river have had their health and environment threatened.

After Imperial Oil spilled the 350,000 litres of oil solvent into the St. Clair River two weeks ago, the Macomb County Water Quality Board voted to fine it \$8 million, yet no charges have been laid or fines levied on this side of the border.

Under Canadian law, the price for illegally dumping toxins into our water is paid for by the people who live in affected areas. From corporate polluters we get apologies and tax write-offs, and from this government we get inaction.

It is time that the government gets serious with polluters and makes it illegal to write off fines for poisoning our environment.

* * *

[Translation]

HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last December, I sent out a mailer detailing the progress regarding highway 50 and asked my constituents for their opinion on this matter.

To date, I have received more than 680 responses. It is obvious that the people of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel have given me the mandate to put pressure on the federal government and the Quebec government.

I ask the Prime Minister of Canada to personally intervene in this matter. It is disgraceful in 2004, after 40 years of unfulfilled promises, that the metropolitan communities of Montreal and the Outaouais are not connected by a highway within Quebec.

It is urgent, for the economic, tourism and social development of an entire region, that highway 50 be immediately completed according to the initial plans, meaning, four lanes and no tolls.

* * *

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Carole-Marie Allard (Laval East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for 25 years now, the aim of Music Arsenal has been to encourage the love of music in young people through concerts designed just for them.

Over the years, Music Arsenal has also played an important role as a cultural agency for young people by initiating them to the joy of cultural discovery.

On Tuesday, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada announced \$30,000 in financial support for this organization, so it can continue its work with young people.

Oral Questions

I am extremely proud to mention this financial support, granted by the Department of Canadian Heritage through its Canadian Arts and Heritage Sustainability Program.

This example is a perfect illustration of our government's commitment to cultural development and access to culture and the arts by Canadians.

* * *

[English]

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have asked government ministers repeatedly to waive the GST on supplies and services donated to the reconstruction of fire-ravaged areas of B.C.

Many uninsured people in the North Thompson have rebuilt their homes and places of business thanks to volunteers from all over North America.

They and the businesses who supply materials should be exempted from paying GST.

Fuel donated to truck agricultural goods like cattle feed into fire-stricken areas in my area should have also been GST-free.

The brave men and women firefighters sold T-shirts to raise relief funds and this government is charging them GST.

I am sure all members of the House can see the unfairness of forcing good Samaritans to pay tax on their generosity.

I wish to thank and congratulate the many generous people who have donated labour and materials to assist fire victims and I call upon the government to do the right thing: waive the GST on those donations.

* * *

●(1415)

[Translation]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Jean-Guy Carignan (Québec Est, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the month of February is officially recognized as Black History Month in Canada.

I am taking this opportunity to stress the significant contribution of our fellow citizens of African origin in the building of today's Canada. In this regard, I would like to mention the remarkable work done by an organization in my riding, the Regroupement des Africains et Africaines Résidant à Duberger-Les-Saules, better known as the REGARDS group.

Considering that the demographic weight of the Quebec City region is constantly diminishing, the arrival of newcomers must now be a core collective priority. More than ever, we must ensure that our residents of adoption get settled under conditions that facilitates their integration, without questioning their skills, values, traditions and intrinsic values.

The approach used by REGARDS helps achieve this dual objective by promoting the union of cultures in a spirit of harmony, tolerance and mutual respect.

The drive of the members of REGARDS and the relevance of their initiatives make them an example of social solidarity while also showing their desire to participate in the building of tomorrow's Canada.

I am pleased to see the positive role played by groups such as REGARDS in the promotion and strengthening of our nation. I congratulate them for their work, and I encourage them to—

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Québec Est, but we must now proceed with oral question period.

The hon. member for Macleod.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, faster than a speeding bullet, that is what they say about Superman, but that is certainly not what they say about public inquiries in Canada. The average length for a public inquiry is about two years.

Has the government, has the Prime Minister, put a deadline on this public inquiry into the Liberal sponsorship scandal?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, quite clearly we want the inquiry to complete its task as quickly as possible, but also we want it to do it thoroughly. We want it to go into every single avenue. We want to leave no stone unturned and we are not going to cut it off on that basis.

Mr. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government actually is acting like it has a one goal lead and there are five minutes left in the third period. It is dragging its feet in the public accounts committee and it looks like it is going to drag its feet as well on the inquiry.

Will the Prime Minister let us know whether or not we will have a result before the next election is called, yes or no?

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the whole point of an independent inquiry is to have the commissioner of inquiry act independently. He will set his own procedure. He will set his own timeline. He will produce interim reports where he thinks that is necessary.

The terms of reference are very broad. They cover all of the questions around sponsorship and advertising that have been raised in the Auditor General's report.

We have the public accounts committee sitting now, as requested by the Prime Minister. They are working. The commission will begin as soon as possible and report to the public as soon as possible.

Mr. Grant Hill (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we hear the terms of reference are really going to be quite broad, but we know it would take an army of lawyers to have the truth on this out before I retire back to my home in Okotoks.

Oral Questions

This question is very specific. Will the government promise Canadians that they will have the truth before we go to the polls in the next election?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member said that we are dragging our feet in the public accounts committee. I believe it was the member for Toronto—Danforth today who tabled a motion asking that all ministers on this file be before the committee next Thursday, with unlimited time. How is that dragging our feet?

I also noted that at the meeting this morning the Auditor General said the Prime Minister and the government have taken this issue seriously and have implemented measures along the lines recommended in her report. What is the problem?

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, apparently yesterday the Prime Minister found some of the questions in this House despicable. I can tell members one thing Canadians find absolutely despicable: the use of taxpayers' money by this Prime Minister's government in the last 10 years.

Will the Prime Minister commit today to pay back the money that was used for Liberal polling, the millions of dollars used for Liberal polling? Will he pay that back from Liberal Party coffers so taxpayers are not footing the bill and subsidizing this party?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what Canadians find despicable is when someone brings into this chamber false information.

• (1420)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this member and this government are certainly the experts on false information.

It came to light that high-ranking RCMP officers were beneficiaries of travel on VIA Rail. Both corporations are currently under investigation in the Liberal sponsorship scandal. Section 54 of the RCMP act code of ethics forbids RCMP officers from accepting gifts.

Could the Minister of Public Safety explain how RCMP officers currently under investigation themselves can investigate VIA Rail while simultaneously getting a free ride? What—

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is probably aware, the administration and management of the RCMP is left up to the commissioner of the RCMP. I can reassure the hon. member that the commissioner is aware of these allegations. He is taking them very seriously. There is a code of conduct for RCMP officers and every Canadian has the right to expect that this code of conduct is observed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as far as the Liberal Party is concerned, transparency has its limits. The Quebec wing of the party is getting its books audited, but we already know the source of its funds. Where they refuse to look, however, is in the hidden funds, places like Liberal Party Trust Fund

2, which paid \$46,000 and \$38,000 respectively to the member for Outremont and the President of Privy Council during the 2000 election campaign, without anyone knowing the source of the funds.

Will the government admit that, in order to thoroughly investigate whether the Liberty Party profited from the sponsorship scandal, what is required is a list of who was behind these secret Liberal funds, and that list must be released immediately?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, and my colleague as well, we passed Bill C-24 in this House. It is a systematic clarification of the situation as far as political party funding is concerned. Bill C-24, now an integral part of the Canada Elections Act, sets the contribution ceiling for organizations outside of a political party at \$1000 a year for all ridings in the country.

The situation has been settled. If my colleague has any documents to table, I invite him to do so.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as of December 31, there were still certain secret funds, and these have now been incorporated into the party coffers. Who were the contributors to those funds?

Mr. Kingsley, the head of Elections Canada, wants to know. If anyone has documents to produce, it is those who had the secret funds, and the unnamed persons who contributed to those trust funds.

Are we going to find out whether or not any sponsorship companies paid into those secret funds? We are now being prevented from finding out whether the Liberal Party did indeed profit from them. That was December 31, 2003. Enough of the hypocrisy.

The Speaker: I have some reservations about that question, but if the hon. government House leader chooses to answer, he may. In my opinion, however, there is considerable doubt as to whether this question concerns the business of government or the business of a political party. If the latter, then the question is out of order.

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising merely to indicate that I do not accept the accusation of hypocrisy from my colleague opposite.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has used every possible opportunity to say that he absolutely wants to go to the bottom of this, that he is prepared to open the books of the Liberal Party.

My question has to do with that statement made by the Prime Minister. If he is prepared to open the books of the Liberal Party, will the Prime Minister allow the inspection of the trusts relating to fund no. 2 and the trusts in connection with each member of Parliament, because several of them had trusts? I want to know if the Prime Minister's transparency efforts go that far?

The Speaker: This question is undoubtedly out of order. Questions on the funding of political parties are not allowed. The hon. member is fully aware of that. If he wishes to ask a question on government policy, that is another matter.

The hon. member for Roberval may now ask a supplementary question.

Oral Questions

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am referring to a statement made by the Prime Minister. I am questioning the Prime Minister on his statement. He said that he wanted to make the Liberal Party funds transparent. I am asking him to stop acting hypocritically and make the slush funds of the Liberal Party available for inspection.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

• (1425)

The Speaker: I cannot hear anything.

[English]

The hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona has the floor.

[Translation]

An hon. member: The Speaker is biased. He is complicit.

[English]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona has the floor. Order.

[Translation]

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. It is impossible to hear what is being said in the House right now. If hon. members want to waste their time, it is not my fault.

The hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona.

[English]

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the risk of being a bit anti-climactic, I have a question for the Prime Minister, who yesterday accused me of attacking public servants. The person I mentioned actually was a political staffer and the Prime Minister should know the difference. Public servants are the ones who got their salaries frozen and political staffers are the ones who got the 30% increase.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister a question about the inquiry, because in an answer he just gave, it seemed like he was not concerned about the open-ended nature of the inquiry. Is he not concerned that the inquiry may be so open-ended that it would go past the election that he intends to call?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reason for my response was because the question was asked of the individual at a time that he was a public servant.

If the hon. member does not want the inquiry to be thorough and if he does not want the inquiry to go down every single avenue, that is his opinion. That is not the opinion that the government would adopt.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what we all want and what the Prime Minister says he wants is for the Canadian people to know everything they need to know before they have to render a judgment on the government. That is what we should all be interested in.

I want to switch from Liberal wars to star wars. I want to go beyond the lover's quarrel between the Tories and the Liberals on the scandals and get to where they are really of one mind when it comes to star wars.

Today the Russians successfully tested a new anti-missile defence technology, thus contributing to the argument that this will all lead to a new arms race.

Will the Prime Minister stand up in the House today and say that Canada will not contribute in any way—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we had a debate in the House two nights ago and we are having a debate on this issue today. The government has been absolutely clear. The Prime Minister and the government are on the record.

We are entering into negotiations and discussions with the United States, our neighbour, to seek to protect Canada against a potential danger. We are not in any way engaged in, nor will we permit ourselves to be engaged in, anything to do with the weaponization of space. It is a clear policy of the Government of Canada and we will stick to it.

* * *

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a week ago, on February 12, the Prime Minister said, "Well, the fact is that very few ministers, Quebec ministers did know".

He acknowledged that some Quebec ministers knew what was going on in this scandal. Now he pronounces that they are innocent and has hurt feelings that anyone should even dare ask a question about who knew what.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister, how far will he go to defend his cabinet ministers?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Prime Minister has done is put in place a process. The opposition would like us to tell the inquiry commissioner what to do, when to do it, and how to do it; however, we prefer to leave those judgments up to him and to allow him to make them as independent and open as possible.

I note that the member for St. Albert today said that this is an historic day for democracy in Canada thanks to the Prime Minister.

• (1430)

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what Canadian is going to lie in bed and feel relieved about that tonight.

It is bizarre to think that so many people down the chain knew how to access so many millions of dollars, but those at the top were just wide-eyed innocent and claim they knew absolutely nothing.

Will the Prime Minister stand up today and announce that he will resign if even one of those cabinet ministers was in cahoots with those gold diggers?

Oral Questions

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, given the propensity of the member's party to base its questions on altered documents, let me remind her of a comment she made during the HRDC issue. I refer to a policy study from Queen's University that suggested that the billion dollar boondoggle was actually a \$6,500 boondoggle.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. This is a \$100 million boondoggle and the government is in the middle of it.

Last week the Prime Minister said in a written statement that a few Quebec cabinet ministers were involved in this mess and knew all about it, but now he is saying they are all innocent.

Will the Prime Minister resign if it is revealed that any of his cabinet ministers knew anything about this sponsorship scandal?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a lesson in mathematics from the member who believes that the Prime Minister signs all 252 million cheques is not really on the floor today.

I want to point out to the member what the Auditor General said this morning, not a week ago, and not two weeks ago. The Auditor General said that the Prime Minister and the government have taken the issue seriously and have implemented measures along the lines recommended in her report. That is today's statement from the Auditor General.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I suppose that after their poll numbers have dropped as dramatically as they have, they have to take it pretty seriously, do they not?

Last week the Prime Minister said in a written statement that a few Quebec cabinet ministers were involved. If he knows that some of them were involved, surely he knows who they are. Why does he not stand up in the House and tell us who they are?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the time cabinet was chosen, all ministers were interviewed as to the knowledge that they had in a wide range of areas.

Subsequent to that, I asked cabinet, at a full cabinet meeting, if there were any ministers who had had previous knowledge of these unacceptable activities. I am prepared to say right now that I have tremendous confidence in these cabinet ministers and in their integrity.

This is the government that brought down the commission of inquiry. This is the government that asked for the special counsel to get the money back. This is the government that put in place the parliamentary committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government says it wants to clean things up. But at the same time we learn that it has continued to award contracts to Media IDA Vision to the tune of \$1.5 million since the Prime Minister took office.

How can the government explain maintaining contractual ties with Media IDA Vision when the Auditor General criticized this firm for its contract delivery in the past?

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Media IDA Vision is the agency of record for the government in placing advertising contracts. It has been for some time. Its contract was extended for a few months in January of this year while a competitive competition takes place, and concludes in a fair and open way to choose a successor.

That is going on and there is nothing in the Auditor General's report that specifically names this company as contravening any laws.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, just three days ago, Media IDA Vision was awarded a contract worth in excess of \$780,000 for the Department of National Defence. The government's logic escapes us.

How can the Minister of Public Works and Government Services justify continuing to give Media IDA Vision contracts when the Auditor General criticized this firm for not fulfilling its obligations in making sure that the government is getting its money's worth?

• (1435)

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is interpreting the Auditor General's report incorrectly.

This is an agency of record, which does not receive large contracts. It places contracts for advertising of government programs such as Health Canada tobacco contracts, for example. It takes a 3% commission for placing that work and getting the best media placements possible across the country.

This is not an issue with which the Auditor General had a difficulty.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the spring of 2001, Createc Plus conducted a survey of voting intentions and the image of the party leaders. As a defence, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services tells us that, now that it has been caught, the Liberal Party of Canada will pay back.

Can the Minister of Public Works and Government Services tell us if the findings of the survey conducted during a Quebec byelection in 2001 were provided to the Quebec Liberal Party?

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of the answer to that particular question.

Oral Questions

However, the criticism that the Auditor General had of public opinion research was that—although she was satisfied overall that the standard was very good—in a few isolated cases within syndicated surveys, there were some questions included in those surveys that showed voter preference.

That was against the guidelines. We accept that and we will take great care in these large syndicated surveys to ensure that no questions are asked about voter preference.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the 2003 general election in Quebec, the federal Liberals repeated the same scenario. They used taxpayer's money to pay for a survey by Createc Plus and provided the survey to the Quebec Liberal Party.

How can one explain that the federal government not only used taxpayers' money for partisan purposes but also violated once again Quebec's election legislation?

[English]

Hon. Stephen Owen (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member will be more specific with his question, I will attempt to provide him with a direct answer.

We have appointed a special counsel to pursue funds that were misappropriated, improperly billed for, or billed for when work was not done.

We said that as a matter of public record, donations to political parties are a matter of record. If the hon. member, or anyone else in the House, has information that would connect any misappropriated money to political donations, then put it before the public inquiry, give it to the special counsel, and bring it up in—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Southeast.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two years ago the former head of Liberal caucus research spilled the beans about the Liberal sponsorship cover-up.

In a *Globe and Mail* article, Jonathan Murphy revealed that top Liberal functionaries from ministers' personal staff" were meeting with Mario Laguë, then a senior official working with Alfonso Gagliano, to discuss ways to "thwart access-to-information requests, and strategies to divert attention from negative aspects of the Auditor-General's reports".

How can the Prime Minister claim that he knew nothing about the Liberal ad scam when his own senior staff were attending meetings to plot the cover-up?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I shall not let anyone in the House accuse Mario Laguë of any wrongdoing. This is an undeserved accusation.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the accusation does not come from anyone in the House. It comes from the former head of Liberal caucus research, and a former Liberal candidate who said that Mario Laguë, then a senior official working with Alfonso Gagliano, worked with senior bureaucrats and political staff, including presumably staff from the former finance minister's

office, to "thwart access-to-information requests, and strategies to divert attention from negative aspects of the Auditor-General's reports".

Who from the Prime Minister's Office attended these meetings and if the Prime Minister is serious about cleaning this up then why is Mario Laguë his communications director today?

● (1440)

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Murphy has never written the preamble nor the conclusion of the allegation that the member is alleging.

It is despicable that we should smear the reputation of people on no grounds whatsoever. It is not acceptable. Enough is enough with the smear campaigns.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the problem with the Prime Minister's defence is that it leads right into his office.

We are quoting from an article written by Jonathan Murphy, a former Liberal candidate in Edmonton and a former Liberal research director. He said that top Liberal functionaries from ministers' personal staff were meeting with Mr. Laguë, then assistant secretary to cabinet, to discuss ways to "thwart access-to-information requests, and strategies to divert attention from negative aspects of the Auditor-General's reports".

Will the Prime Minister stand up today and explain exactly what Mr. Laguë was doing and what has he done since? The road leads right into the Prime Minister's Office.

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the opposition again comes forward with another slander and another attack on persons by calling people thieves over here and calling them sleazy over there.

Let us ask what the *Globe and Mail* feels about the Prime Minister today:

That the government is willing to have itself held accountable when things go wrong is surely a sign of positive change.

Most Canadians are already tired of the daily barrage of shrill charges and allegations, and are ready to let the official inquiries do the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton Southwest.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not the ones making the allegations. It is a Liberal candidate in Edmonton. It is a former head of Liberal research that is making these allegations in a May 2002 article.

He said that Mario Laguë was discussing ways to "thwart access-to-information requests, and strategies to divert attention from negative aspects of the Auditor-General's reports". The public does not believe that the Prime Minister does not know. He must stand up and restore his credibility.

The only way that he can do that is to come clean on this issue, explain exactly what he knew and when, and take action against cabinet—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us try *La Presse* today. *La Presse* asked what voters demand from the head of government.

The answer was that he not sidestep the issue but immediately recognize its seriousness, which is what the current Prime Minister did.

* * *

[Translation]

HAITI

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Haiti is very distressing. Many Haitians live in Canada—especially in my riding of Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel. They still have many family members in Haiti.

Since Canada, in its most recent throne speech, made a commitment to play an important role in resolving crises that emerge on the international scene, can the minister tell this House and all Canadians what kind of leadership role he intends to take in order to arrive at a swift and peaceful resolution of the national crisis affecting the people of Haiti?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel for his question. He shows great concern for his constituents and for this group.

I would like to assure the hon. member and the House that the government is following the situation in Haiti very closely. I am in communication and working in close collaboration with the foreign affairs ministers, and their administrators, in the Caribbean.

My colleague, the Minister responsible for the Francophonie, is in communication with the Francophonie. We are working together with the OAS, the United States, and the countries involved, to find a viable, long-lasting solution in Haiti.

We are continuing to work on this. I can assure—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle.

* * *

[English]

TRUST FUNDS

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the right hon. Prime Minister. Yesterday the Chief Electoral Officer expressed grave concern that many MPs have trust funds which are in fact secret bank accounts, totalling perhaps millions of dollars. Canadians are concerned about a gap in ethics and accountability in this country.

Could the Prime Minister tell the House how many members of his caucus have trust funds? Will he disclose how much is in those funds and where the—

• (1445)

The Speaker: I have already explained that questions about political contributions, as the hon. member knows, are out of order,

and if the hon. member has a supplementary question, we will hear it.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in light of the fact the House of Commons passed Bill C-24, which deals with contributions, I want to ask the Prime Minister how many members of his caucus have trust funds, where did that money come from and what is the source of donors. That is very relevant in light of Bill C-24.

The Speaker: If the hon. member wishes to raise a point of order after question period, I will deal with it. I have a citation ready for him on this point. In my view, as I have indicated, the question as phrased, is out of order.

The hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill.

* * *

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the industry minister pleads ignorance of sponsorship program abuse, but it took place on her watch. She was president of the Treasury Board. Her job was to approve all government spending and ensure that no rules were broken. Yet her story is that in this senior position of trust she saw nothing, heard nothing and certainly did nothing while the public purse was being ripped off. Just what was she taking her salary for?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member to read some of the literature that we get in the House, like the *Public Accounts of Canada*. The Auditor General, who signed the attest audit in 2001, had 562 staff whose full time job was to examine all spending in government. They did not uncover this scandal, yet the opposition expects a minister to know intimately the details of what is two one hundredths of one per cent of the total envelope.

The auditor could not catch it, not because it was not a good audit, but because it was a very small area.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what Canadians do know from the Auditor General is that when the industry minister was president of the Treasury Board, she was negligent in protecting the public's money. She proved to be a toothless watchdog while the Liberals looted the treasury and broke every rule in the book. The industry minister failed to serve Canadians faithfully and well. Why did she betray the public trust?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it seems that members on the other side cannot add and they cannot read. I would encourage them to read what the auditor said which was, after the government had alerted her office to this problem, they went to work under the current finance minister, when he was the minister for Public Works and Government Services, and under the Minister of Industry, when she was in charge of the Treasury Board, and cleaned it up.

Oral Questions

The auditor gives the former president of the Treasury Board full marks for fixing this problem.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the public accounts committee is charged with getting to the bottom of who authorized the theft of millions of dollars from the taxpayer. The Prime Minister admits that some cabinet ministers knew about the abuses in the sponsorship program.

Will the Prime Minister assure the House that any privy councillor in the know is not sitting on that committee as it looks into this scandal?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the opposition likes to repeat things, let me repeat what was said today. Most Canadians are already tired of the daily barrage of shrill charges and allegations, and are ready to let the official inquiries do the work.

If the hon. member has a concern, if he has a single substantive fact to put on the table, I would encourage him to do so. In the absence of that, he should stop the slander.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is this Prime Minister who said that some ministers were involved and in the know. That is what this Prime Minister said.

What I am saying is that he has now stacked the public accounts committee with members of the Privy Council. That is a conflict of interest.

Will this Prime Minister take immediate steps to remove the privy councillors in order to remove that conflict of interest?

• (1450)

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that hon. member is actually from my home province. He was indeed the attorney general of that province. I think it is disgraceful that he displays so little understanding of due law and process.

* * *

[Translation]

REFUGEES

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a number of days ago, three Palestinians who were denied refugee status sought sanctuary in the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce church in Montreal to avoid being deported. Although Thérèse, Khabil and Nabih Ayoub lived in refugee camps for 50 years, Canada has no qualms about giving them a one-way ticket to a refugee camp in Lebanon.

Can the minister explain the logic behind Canada's decision to refuse to grant refugee status to applicants, although these same authorities confirm that status by sending them to refugee camps in Lebanon?

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as she knows, I am not able to comment on a particular case, but all cases are given full and due process. When people seek sanctuary in a church, we do not go after them. We have

a very fair process. One of the processes that is often criticized is that we are too fair.

Canada can be very proud of the processes we have in our immigration and refugee system.

[Translation]

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the current Immigration and Refugee Protection Act came into force on June 28, 2002, and the refugee appeal division is still not in place.

What is the reason behind the minister's delay in setting up this appeal division, which is essential to the implementation of an equitable process for all individuals claiming refugee status?

[English]

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a very fair process. There are at least four avenues of review or appeal on every application. It is always looked at with common sense, fairness and transparency.

Canadians can be very proud of the system we have in place.

* * *

GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the President of the Treasury Board. Communication Canada is supposed to be gone by March 2004, yet the Treasury Board has approved an additional \$9.8 million.

The Prime Minister boastfully claims that he has killed the program. Why has he not killed its budget?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to receive an actual question about the Treasury Board. The member who poses it is someone for whom I have a great deal of respect and with whom I have worked closely in the House.

It is a good question. It is a legitimate question. The reality is, though, when we close something down, there are closing down costs. We closed it down and we paid out the costs.

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, CPC): Mr. Speaker, talk about closing costs. The problem agency has spent \$92.5 million so far this year. The government admits the failure and says it has shut it down.

If that is the case, why is Treasury Board asking Parliament for an additional \$9.8 million and still counting? When will the waste ever end?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me see if I can sort this out for the member. On December 12 of last year, three-quarters through the fiscal year, the government changed and the new Prime Minister shut down Communication Canada.

In the principles of accrual accounting, one has to assign all the costs and close it out. We closed it out, and it is costing a little over \$9 million to do that.

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs to comment on the most recent homicide bombings that recently occurred in Israel and other parts of the world, which specifically target civilians.

As a personal friend of the brother of Yechezkel Goldberg, the Canadian-Israeli victim of the most recent atrocity by a Palestinian terrorist group, this is now much closer to home. I have as a result come to appreciate a whole new dimension to the human cost of terrorism.

Homicide bombs are a crime against humanity and those who encourage these acts must be held accountable.

• (1455)

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the House will recall that after the tragic death of Dr. Goldberg, we united together in the House to condemn the terrorist attack and to regret his tragic death.

I also want to thank the hon. member for his question because the question clearly illustrates that members of the House want to make it clear to everyone in the international community that we in Canada condemn acts of terrorism.

We recognize that this terrible violence and the tragic death of Dr. Goldberg was destined and designed not only to kill an innocent individual, but to destroy the chances of peace in the Middle East for which we work. We urge all parties as a testimony for this to work for peace in the Middle East.

* * *

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to review again, Jonathan Murphy was a Liberal research director. He has written a tell-all insider's view of what was going on in the Liberal Party. He states that Mario Lague, now the Prime Minister's communications director, was involved and given a mandate in practising strategies to divert attention away from the Auditor General's report, the practice of discussing ways to thwart access to information; all in simple terms, meaning how to cover up what was going on in the sponsorship scandal.

Now he is the head of the Prime Minister's communications office. Why?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, as has been asked, the member should not use his position in the House to impugn the credibility or attack unfairly someone else.

The simple fact is that if the commission of inquiry wishes to interview Mr. Lague, we have made it very clear that it can interview him and it can interview any other Canadian who may have knowledge as to this affair. All it has to do is call him.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are hardly doing something that has not already been done by a senior Liberal in the *Globe and Mail* two years ago.

The Auditor General has in fact already questioned Mr. Lague about this. She asked about the poor record keeping at the Privy Council Office from 1998 to 2003.

Why has the Prime Minister re-hired staff that had intimate knowledge of the sponsorship scandal, just as he has reappointed cabinet ministers with obvious knowledge of what was going on and put them on the council? Will the Prime Minister admit he has made a mistake in this most recent hire?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Lague was an assistant secretary of cabinet. He also assisted in helping various cabinet committees. One of them was the communications committee. He was not involved in other matters, and he was not involved in the management of the sponsorship file.

* * *

[Translation]

EQUALIZATION PAYMENTS

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister says he wants to get down to real business. How can he expect us to take him seriously, when this very morning the Liberal majority on the Standing Committee on Finance refused to apply retroactivity, in the event that the equalization agreement is renewed several months past its expiry date, thereby depriving Quebec and the provinces of financial resources, which they need precisely in order to get down to real business?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the equalization program is a very valuable federal program at about \$10 billion a year. The largest beneficiary province in the country is the province of Quebec. That is a natural part of the cohesion that holds this nation together. I can assure the hon. member that when the renewal package is concluded, it will be retroactive to April 1 of this year.

* * *

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Rick Laliberte (Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, critical issues of economic development and infrastructure in the mid-Canada region require innovative partnerships. The Canada-Saskatchewan northern development agreement is certainly a partnership to build on.

Just this week the first projects for northern Saskatchewan were announced by the northern development board totalling \$2.7 million. Can the minister explain how these projects will advance the economy of this region?

Hon. Rey Pagtakhan (Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question and for his continuing concern for this region.

Points of Order

Indeed the eight projects announced by my department under the Canada-Saskatchewan northern development agreement will increase for northern communities the number of jobs created, the number of skills development programs available, particularly in the hospitality and tourism sector, the number of accessible transportation routes for freight and people, as well as the number of aboriginal employment development counsellors. All of this will lead to a more sustainable economic picture in that part of this beautiful country.

* * *

• (1500)

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Neigette-et-la Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 200 seasonal workers on the North Shore demonstrated their anger yesterday by blocking highway 138. The protesting Sans-Chemise have been hit hard by the softwood lumber crisis and the seasonal nature of their employment, and no longer have access to employment insurance. They cannot understand why the government is doing nothing, when once again this year the EI fund has recorded a \$3 billion surplus.

When will the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development understand that now is not the time to reduce contributions, but rather the time to improve the program?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is obviously a cause for concern, but the EI program is dedicated to finding solutions to such problems.

The other component of my department is working on finding long term solutions. This of course means that all local, regional and provincial resources must be focussed on seeking lasting solutions, because it is obvious that economic diversification must be encouraged, if only—

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Minister for Human Resources and Skills Development, but oral question period is now over.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Monte Kwinter, Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services of Ontario.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it being Thursday, I would like to ask the government House leader what the business is for today, tomorrow and of course into next week.

We also would like to make sure that the leader lets the House know in detail what legislation will be brought forward and if it is going to be in the same form as it was when it was first presented.

[Translation]

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, we will continue with the debate on the opposition motion.

Tomorrow, we will consider report stage of Bill C-15, respecting international transfer of offenders, followed by a motion to refer to committee before second reading Bill C-19, respecting corrections.

On Monday, we will call report stage of Bill C-10, respecting cannabis. If this is completed, we will return to business not finished this week.

Tuesday and Thursday of next week shall be allotted days. The business on Wednesday will depend on progress that may be made in committee and I will communicate directly with my friends opposite when this becomes more clear.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Roberval on a point of order.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, earlier, during oral question period, an extremely unfortunate event occurred: the Chair decided to prevent me from asking a question on what is, in my opinion, a government operation.

In fact, during the time remaining in question period, I verified the rights of parliamentarians to ask questions and, in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, on page 425, I found the following,

—its primary purpose must be the seeking of information from the government and calling the government to account for its actions.

Members should be given the greatest possible freedom in the putting of questions that is consistent with the other principles.

Finally, page 426 states that members must,

ask a question that is within the administrative responsibility of the government or the individual Minister addressed.

Mr. Speaker, my question was directed to the Prime Minister and dealt essentially with one thing: the audit and recovery of funds announced by the Prime Minister as part of his responsibilities as Prime Minister. This is a cleanup and audit operation with respect to a scandal that has resulted in over 450 questions in the House of Commons. This question related solely to this operation announced by the Prime Minister.

Had my question been, “Does the Prime Minister intend to widen his audit to include such and such a company?”, you would have ruled it in order, and I would have had an answer. “Does the Prime Minister intend to widen his investigation to include such and such a minister?” I would have had my answer and I would have been able to ask my question. “Does the Prime Minister intend to widen his investigation to include such and such a person?” I would have been able to ask my question and I would have had my answer. “Does the Prime Minister intend to widen his investigation to include such and such a trust?” I could have asked my question and I would have had my answer.

Points of Order

Mr. Speaker, when I ask, “Does the Prime Minister intend to widen his investigation to include the trusts of the Liberal Party?” and am not allowed to put my question, I think that is an outrageous decision, to say the least. Just because the word “Liberal” is in a question does not necessarily make that question unfair. It is about one of the Prime Minister's responsibilities, an announcement, government operations; this is the kind of question you have allowed in the past.

You have created a precedent, Mr. Speaker, by accepting a question earlier this week, along the lines of, “Is the audit that the Prime Minister has announced and is the recovery of money going to extend as far as the finances of the Liberal Party?” You allowed that question, Mr. Speaker, and you created the precedent. I do not know why referring to the trusts of the Liberal Party rather than the coffers of the Liberal Party disqualifies me from asking a question on the pretext that it is out of order.

Therefore, I ask you to review my right and shed some light on the biggest scandal in Canada in 50 years.

• (1505)

[English]

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too asked a question this afternoon but it was a bit different from the one asked by the member from the Bloc Québécois. His question came from the angle of the sponsorship funds. Mine came from a statement made by the Chief Electoral Officer about his concern with regard to trust funds.

I would argue that this is relevant because the House passed Bill C-24 a while ago. The bill deals with the funding of election campaigns, the funding of candidate campaigns, and the funding of campaigns for members of Parliament. Trust funds have the same kind of effect in terms of funding campaigns for people who run for political office. I maintain that I was asking something that was in the competence of the Government of Canada.

Also, Revenue Canada issues tax receipts. That too was a relevant part of my question because we do not know whether or not tax receipts are going to be issued for trust funds.

The last point I want to make is very important. I asked the government House leader a similar question about trust funds this morning in the House affairs committee. The very competent and knowledgeable member for Peterborough, who is the chair of the committee, allowed the question. It seems to me that it was the responsibility of the House leader to answer the question and he did answer the question. For those reasons, I would argue that the question I asked today should have been in order.

I specifically said to you, Mr. Speaker, in my second question, in light of the fact that the House had passed Bill C-24, the bill to limit the funding of campaigns by trade unions and corporations and to set limits on national parties and local candidates; I used that in my preamble.

I therefore maintain that my question should have been in order because of those facts.

[Translation]

The Speaker: The Chair has heard the arguments of the hon. members for Roberval and Regina—Qu'Appelle. I will start with the member for Roberval.

He mentioned a question relating to an investigation of the finances of the Liberal Party. I did not hear that question. The one I did hear, which I indicated was out of order, was his first, concerning the funds made available to members locally by their party. In my opinion, that question was out of order.

He asked a second question, I am sure but there was so much noise that I did not hear a single word of his question. His colleagues were exchanging words with those across the floor, and there was really a great deal of noise during that second question. I stood up but I said nothing. No minister rose afterward. I then gave the floor to the hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona to ask his question. In my opinion, it was too late. There was no minister to answer his question, so I continued. I did not, however, declare the question out of order because I did not hear it. I heard not a single word of it.

I will take a good look at the blues when they are available and then give my ruling on the second question. It is entirely possible that it was in order, but I do not know.

• (1510)

[English]

With respect to the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, I have some authorities that I want to read to the hon. member, which I hope will be of assistance to him in this regard.

[Translation]

The first item quoted by the hon. member for Roberval is found on page 426 of Marleau and Montpetit concerning admissible questions.

A member may, during oral question period—and I quote:

—ask a question that is within the administrative responsibility of the government or the individual Minister addressed.

I am well aware that the Chief Electoral Officer is an officer of Parliament, but there is not minister responsible for him to answer on his behalf in the House.

I have another citation from Beauchesne's sixth edition, on page 122. There was a discussion in 1986 in which the Speaker set out some guidelines for question period. He said, and I quote:

Ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities.

Both questions asked by the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle concern Liberal Party business. It is undoubtedly a matter of great interest to many people but it is inadmissible in the House because these citations require that people not question ministers about internal party affairs. The question regarding funds held by members is really a question for the party, and not the government.

In my opinion, the question is out of order. I can think of a 1986 Speaker's ruling, which said that questions may be put to ministers only in areas related to their current portfolios and not to responsibilities they may have had previously in the cabinet or in the party.

Privilege

[English]

Having looked at all these authorities and having made rulings on this very matter myself in the past in respect of questions about party financing, I have little hesitation in saying to the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, as I would have said to the member for Roberval had his question been the same one, but I see he was talking about a second question, that this question is not one that is properly before the House.

The hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle is a very experienced member, more experienced than I in this House, and he knows that he can go to the procedures and House affairs committee to see if he can get these guidelines changed. It has happened before.

However it is not for the Speaker, in a ruling on a question of this sort, to make wilful changes to the practices of the House, and in ruling the hon. member's question out of order, with great regret, I am only enforcing the rules that the House expects of its humble servant, the Speaker, who does what the rules prescribe as the *serviteur de la Chambre*.

I know the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle appreciates the very delicate position in which the Speaker finds himself in making such a ruling in respect of a question from such a veteran of this place.

• (1515)

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in your comments on the remarks by the member for Roberval, you said there might have been a second question that would have been in order, but no one would have answered it on this side of the House.

If the question that you did not hear had been in order, we would certainly have been pleased to answer it. However, we would have had to hear it as well. On this side of the House, we did not hear this second question either.

If it were asked again, I suppose we would have the pleasure, if you see it fit, to answer it.

The Speaker: Yes and certainly it is not necessary for a minister to answer a question. It is quite possible to say nothing. This is also one of the practices in the House.

[English]

DOCUMENT TABLED BY PRESIDENT OF THE TREASURY BOARD

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on page 63 of the 22nd edition of *Erskine May*, it states:

...it is of paramount importance that ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity.

Yesterday, during question period, the hon. President of the Treasury Board said, and I quote from page 757 of *Hansard*, “the member for Calgary Southeast”, and that would be myself, “received \$115,000 from the sponsorship program”.

Following question period, when, on a point of order, I challenged the veracity of his statement, the minister corrected himself and said:

There was \$115,000 given to the organization in the hon. member's riding...I said in his riding. It was given two years in a row.

That appears on page 760 of *Hansard*.

He was challenged by members of the opposition to table the document from which he was evidently citing. Finally, at the end of the day he returned to the House and did that, at page 784 of *Hansard*.

However, having tabled the document, we had an opportunity to review it. It turns out that no such grant existed, that neither myself nor my riding, nor any organization in my riding received a \$115,000 grant from the sponsorship fund or any kind of grant.

Earlier today the hon. President of the Treasury Board said “It's despicable when members bring into this House false information”. I concur.

I would therefore like to provide the President of the Treasury Board with the opportunity, which *Erskine May* suggests he ought to take up at the earliest occasion, to correct what I am sure was a completely inadvertent error by impugning wrongly myself and my constituency.

[Translation]

Hon. Jacques Saada (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to take a little time to look at what happened, to consult and to get back to you on this issue.

[English]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville on a question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

COMMENTS OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will go through this as quickly as I can. You are familiar with the arguments that I have made previously.

On Monday, February 16, in response to my question about a CBC report on spending on the firearms program, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness said, and I am quoting now from page 613 of *Hansard*:

Mr. Speaker, let me be absolutely clear. We do not accept that number referred to in the report referred to by the hon. member. In fact, we have asked Radio Canada to provide us with its numbers and its calculations which to date it has refused to do.

On Tuesday officials with CBC *Zone libre* provided my office with the following information. I want to quote it, but I have to be careful because names are mentioned.

I was surprised to read that [the Deputy Prime Minister] did not get a response to a request for information regarding the numbers cited in our report. I have not received any request for information on Monday from her because, of course, we would respond.

This is from the officials at that program.

Yesterday these same CBC officials advised, and again I quote:

We are so surprised by [the Deputy Prime Minister]'s claim that we did refuse to speak to her since [the Deputy Prime Minister, the former solicitor general], Bill Baker, Morris Rosenberg all refused our requests for an interview to discuss the contents of our research and that our requests for visuals in Miramichi and the Edmonton site were refused.

Mr. Speaker, you have heard all of my arguments and I will not go through why misleading statements by ministers in the House should be treated as contempt. I will not use up any more of the House's time by repeating them, but suffice it to say that the Deputy Prime Minister made a statement that was factually incorrect. This error misled me and every member of the House.

In order to perform my fundamental functions in the House, I have always insisted on accurate and truthful information. That is why the making of erroneous and misleading statements in the House may be treated as contempt.

Let me summarize briefly. The Deputy Prime Minister said that she had asked Radio Canada how it had arrived at its conclusion that the \$2 billion was being spent on the gun registry. We find out now that in fact this is patently false. She did not even contact Radio Canada.

Democracy cannot function if we are not told the truth. I ask you to investigate, Mr. Speaker. This is the minister who said, 17 times in the House, "We have nothing to hide" and "we will get to the bottom of this". In light of what I have just revealed, how can we believe a word the government says?

I am prepared to move the appropriate motion should the Speaker rule that the matter is a prima facie case of privilege.

• (1520)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to have a moment to review the record, but judging from the comments, the words and the quotes that the hon. member just used, the Deputy Prime Minister said that she had not yet seen that information.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: No, she said she had already contacted them.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: The member said that she had not yet seen the information. I do not think she said, and I will clarify the record, that they had refused to provide the information, which is what the member is alleging right now.

Having said that she had not seen the information is certainly something that I have not heard disputed here from what the Deputy Prime Minister said. Therefore I believe this is certainly not a prima facie question of privilege and I would encourage the Speaker to rule against it.

The Speaker: I think we will have to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister in light of the allegations that have been made. I think in the circumstances we will wait to hear from her. The statement quoted from *Hansard* by the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville appears to be accurate in terms of what was stated there.

I will have to hear from the minister in due course before the Chair is able to make a ruling on the matter.

Supply

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—AMERICAN ANTI-MISSILE DEFENCE SHIELD

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this debate. It is obviously a very important issue which will affect not only Canada's future but that of the United States and indeed the globe.

It is rare that I get up without a very specific and definite opinion on something, but in fact I think we have had quite a bit of discussion on extreme opinions on this issue. I would like to perhaps reflect for a few minutes on some of the issues at stake and how important it is that Parliament is having this debate and that it has a role to play in the ultimate decision to be made.

We have a long tradition of working cooperatively with the United States on the defence of the North American continent. I have some personal history on that, having served in the RCAF radar reserve squadron based at Uplands Airport and having served on the Pinetree Line of radar stations in the 1950s. I have to balance that long tradition of working for our common defence against other considerations.

We also have a long tradition in Canada of opposing the proliferation of weapons, of working for the reduction of weapons around the world, of working for arms control, and of working diplomatically and multilaterally for stability in the world to prevent the use of weapons of mass destruction or major weapons of any kind.

I do not know how many people in the House will remember a video called *If You Love This Planet* by Helen Caldicott, in which she talked about the fact that the world possesses enough atomic weapons to destroy the entire globe 14 times over. This obviously consumes a great deal of the world's resources, represents an ongoing danger to the world, and deprives us of the capacity to deal with many of the important needs of the people who are on this planet with us.

Finally, I would say that one of our long term traditions and unalterable positions is that of opposition to weapons in space. There is an issue about whether a ballistic missile defence system will work. I am grateful to the constituent who sent me a copy of an article from *Physics Today*, the publication of the American Institute of Physics, around the practicalities of either boost stage interception of missiles or later interception of missiles, either of which present significant technical problems and difficulties.

Nonetheless, the Americans are proceeding this October with the first phase of a missile defence system, so should Canada be involved in discussions about possible involvement in that and our relationship with the Americans around that system?

Supply

I think we need to know more. Are there costs to Canada? What are we being asked to contribute? What are our priorities? If there are costs involved, if we are expected to contribute financially, then how much and what other things will we not be able to do because we are doing that? If participation involves Canadian money, is participation more important than other things that we need to and must do for our military? Would this involve some establishments on Canadian soil?

Parliament does not know these things. The opposition does not know these things. I think before we can make a reasonable decision on this issue, we have to know these things. We will only find out some of this, first, if we are involved in discussions and, second, if Parliament is kept fully informed of those discussions.

I would like to put forward some reasons that would not be good reasons to enter into an agreement of this kind.

• (1525)

Pleasing the United States is not a good enough reason. This country has forged and will continue to forge its own foreign policy and, as a result of that, its own defence policy.

The argument that this presents research, technological and commercial opportunities for Canada—in other words, money—is also not a good enough reason to enter into this. Simply because it might be good for our defence companies is not a good enough reason.

I will share with the House and with the minister my concern about some of the wording in the letter he has sent to Secretary Rumsfeld, which seems to imply that the issue is not whether we are part of this but under what conditions.

I note that the minister is in the House and I appreciate that he is here to hear my comments. I am concerned about such wording as the following:

It is our intent to negotiate in the coming months a Missile Defence Framework—

It also states:

We believe that our two nations should move on an expedited basis to amend the NORAD agreement to take into account NORAD's contribution to the missile defence mission.

It is important that discussions continue and that we not dismiss out of hand an opportunity to have some influence on what the Americans are doing and will be doing. However, I have said that I think Parliament has a crucial role to play here. This government has talked about democratic reform, about giving members of Parliament more authority, and on this I think it is at least as important as the Kyoto accord. I would urge the government: before decisions are made, Parliament should be able to express its opinion in a vote.

I think, however, that it is equally important, because there have been extreme positions and information put out on both sides of this issue, that the government keep Parliament informed, both directly and through its committees, and that there be regular briefings on what the discussions are and how they are proceeding so that this Parliament can develop its own opinion and have an opportunity to express that opinion.

Finally, I will say that it is a long and fine tradition of the Liberal Party, which is the current government, that defence policy follows

foreign policy and is governed by our foreign policy and our role in the world, not vice versa. As we proceed on this, we have to look to our long traditions, those traditions I mentioned at the beginning. The reduction of weapons, multilateral diplomacy, opposition to weaponization of space, and arms control have to remain our objectives in order for us to work toward a more peaceful world, not to work toward a world that continues to be based on an arms race of one kind or another.

• (1530)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the hon. member who has just spoken and who has spoken the truth in a very direct way.

In the so-called official opposition, the Conservative Party, which absolutely supports, it seems uncritically, Canada entering into the participation with the U.S. missile defence program, or among the majority of her colleagues, there have not been very many members who have had the courage to stand up and say that the minister of defence's letter to U.S. defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld is in fact being misrepresented.

It clearly does say that it is about entering into not just an exploration; really, it clearly states the intent to participate and that what the negotiations are about is precisely the nature of that participation. I commend the hon. member for having the courage to stand up and speak the truth as she sees it.

I want to ask two questions. I think the comments of the hon. member calling for Parliament to be fully informed are useful and important, but as the former whip of the government party, this member knows that one has a great deal of difficulty getting to the details and getting a really solid grounding in what it is we are dealing with here if it is just through parliamentary debate. That is one of the reasons why committees are very important.

Probably the member will know that in the spring the foreign affairs committee voted to hold hearings on this issue so that we could inform ourselves of details and bring experts and so on before the committee before the end of the spring session. That did not happen. The session came to an end and those hearings were not held.

I wonder if the member would agree that at the very least the vote taken at the foreign affairs committee for those hearings to be held is as relevant as it ever was, perhaps even more relevant. Would she agree that it would be an important forum as well as the parliamentary discussion that goes on here?

• (1535)

Ms. Marlene Catterall: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the compliments from the member for Halifax. I do want to respond to her point. I think in my remarks I did in fact refer to both Parliament and its committees.

It is not for me to tell the foreign affairs committee what it should or should not be doing. I do think that as this progresses perhaps joint meetings of the foreign affairs committee and the committee on national defence and veterans affairs might be a very good idea and might give the ministers involved the opportunity to have those discussions directly with the two committees that are most knowledgeable and most likely to have well informed opinions on the subject.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Ottawa West—Nepean. I would like to congratulate her because she spoke with her heart and soul. It takes a lot of courage, and I commend her for that.

However, she said at the beginning that she was concerned with the future of this planet; that meant a lot to her. I would like her to elaborate on her concerns about the future of this planet and peace on this planet.

[*English*]

Ms. Marlene Catterall: Mr. Speaker, if I may first go back to the comment of the member for Halifax who suggested that the letter from the Minister of National Defence to Secretary Rumsfeld had been misrepresented, this is not certainly not something I have said. I did say I had some hesitation about certain wording in the letter. That is hardly to say it has been misrepresented. That may be her opinion. It is not mine.

[*Translation*]

I thank my colleague opposite for his congratulations. Give me two hours, perhaps I will be able to begin explaining my perspective on the future of our planet.

Canada's position in international affairs has always been to work for peace on earth and for the regions that are the most in need. I hope that what we do in this situation will reflect the positions that we have always taken, that is, the reduction of armaments.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I hope I can be as eloquent as my colleague, the member for Ottawa West—Nepean, and I thank you for your great judgment.

First, I wish to inform you that I will be splitting my time with a young father, the member for Rosemont—Petite-Patrie. I am convinced that this young father will be powerful in expressing his special concerns about this missile defence shield.

Normally in this House, we hear comments like, "It is a pleasure to rise to speak to" or "I am happy to address this issue today". This afternoon, I dare say that, as a member of Parliament, I rise because it is my duty to speak to the Bloc Québécois motion.

Like the member for Ottawa West—Nepean and many other colleagues, I have reservations about that missile defence shield, especially regarding its impact.

As I begin my speech, I must explain my reasons for rising in the House. I feel it is my duty because of my age, and because of my wisdom, I hope; because, like you, I am a grandfather, except that I have only one grandchild whereas you have four already and you will have a fifth next week. I congratulate you on that.

Supply

That missile defence shield intrigues and worries me. What impact will it have on our grandchildren? On what kind of a planet will our children live?

Since September 11, 2001, the situation and mindset of people around the world have changed considerably. People have developed terrorism phobia. What is a phobia? It is an irrational fear caused by a person, a situation or an event. Is such an irrational fear or terrorism phobia at the origin of the missile defence program? Unfortunately, I think the answer is yes.

I have several points to make. For example, there is this phobia about terrorism. What are the implications? Among other things, flights of British Airways or Air France were cancelled. Why? Because someone presumed, suggested or believed that there was a terrorist on board the plane, and so, everything was cancelled.

Terrorism is being blamed for all sorts of unfortunate situations on this planet. Here is a case in point. There was an accident in Russia not too long ago. The roof of a busy aquatic centre collapsed, killing or wounding several people.

The first thing the Russian government did was to blame it on terrorism, but when the dust settled, it was determined that the accident was due to a terrible construction flaw. This is what terrorism phobia is doing.

Moreover, we are now using terrorism to try to put our minds at ease. I will give an example to illustrate my point. Countries conduct military aggressions on one another. There are also military aggressions within countries. And are these aggressions justified? By blaming terrorism. The number one excuse is "We are fighting terrorism".

• (1540)

Even here, in Canada, we are feeling the impact of terrorism phobia. Think of the bills that were passed or out forward, such as the border control bill, the identity card bill which has yet to be passed, and the bill respecting military control over certain zones. Is the source of all these bills and all the past and future discussions about them not terrorism phobia? That is not a question for me to answer.

What fears and concerns should we have, my colleague who is a young father and myself, as a grandfather? Will the missile defence shield bring us back to the cold war era, when Russia had missiles pointed at the United States and the U.S. had missiles pointed at Russia, and the question was which would be the first to launch a missile.

The cold war was the time when all nations in the world underwent the most significant militarization. We have become armaments experts. We can almost hit a dime from very far away. Weapons are increasingly sophisticated and powerful. Just think about depleted uranium. The cold war gave birth to all kinds of weapons of mass destruction. Every nation in the world, from the United States to Canada, France and Great Britain, tried to get their hands on the most sophisticated offensive or defensive weapon.

Supply

Because of this shield, will we try to specialize and buy even more sophisticated weapons? Will the shield lead to the weaponization of space? Unfortunately, I think so, because the Americans have made it very clear. They said that weapons will be based in space. Weapons will be put in place to destroy other weapons in space. It is crystal clear. We are heading toward the weaponization of space.

Are we preparing for future star wars, *Star Trek* and the likes? We all remember Jules Verne and his *80,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. People thought he was crazy, but nowadays we take these things for granted.

Another concern that comes to mind is costs. How much is this going to cost to our taxpayers? Mr. Bush said it is no big deal; it will cost between \$60 billion and \$100 billion. However, according to one of his citizens, Dr. Kenneth Arrow, the Nobel Economics laureate of 1972 and a professor at Stanford University, the costs could reach between \$800 billion and \$1,200 billion by 2015. To use a figure the people in Quebec will understand, it will cost the United States \$1.2 trillion.

I know that the federal government has no qualms about wasting public funds. But can the taxpayers afford spending millions of dollars on this?

•(1545)

Before I conclude, I would just like to remind the House that, for the people to be sovereign, the elected representatives—like you and me—must do what the people decide. Therefore, before voting, we should find out how the people want us to deal with the missile defence shield?

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague for his speech. He is a proud grandfather.

I have been a member of the Canada-United States Association for eight years. We have had contacts with our American counterparts, both senators and representatives, during all those years. The missile defence issue was often on the agenda. We have had discussions on that subject. I can say that, in the United States, support for this program is not unanimous. Even among U.S. representatives and senators, many questions have been raised, there is obviously much concern about this program.

In the course of our discussions, a number of us have clearly said that we are against the missile defence program. It now looks like some are ready to get involved without further consultation. I know that members have asked for a free vote on this issue and the Prime Minister's answer was a definite no.

I would like my colleague to tell us if we always have to follow what the Americans are doing, without any consultation. We have to be allowed a free vote on this issue here, in our Parliament. We look for alternatives later.

The missile shield issue is a real Pandora's box that will never eradicate terrorism. This is what we are seeing now. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say on that.

•(1550)

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Laurentides, who just finished my speech for me.

That was precisely one of my concerns. Why do we have to blindly follow the Americans? This is not a question of liking the American people or not. Before we make a decision, let us be open about this issue and consult our people about what they think about this missile defence shield. This decision is critical for the future of our children and grandchildren. As the member for Ottawa West—Nepean said earlier, we are talking about the future of the universe. Therefore, let us have consultations and ensure that a free vote is held in this House so that each and everyone of us can vote freely on this program.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today, on this February 19, 2004, to this motion put forward by the Bloc Québécois. I remind the House that I already spoke on this issue a few days ago, during the take note debate, late in the evening. I think that the motion that the Bloc Québécois has put forward today in the House shows our real commitment and our real concern about an issue that Quebeckers take at heart.

During the take note debate, my colleagues indicated that, while quite often 70% of Canadians support discussions on a missile defence shield and its implementation, I am deeply convinced that, if a poll was taken on this issue in Quebec, the numbers would be reversed. There would be probably only 30% of Quebeckers who would favour this type of technology for the years to come.

This shows that the debate that we are having in the House of Commons is putting Quebec at odds with the rest of Canada, as Quebec has always been. This was true for the ratification of the Kyoto protocol, and it is also true about the deployment of a missile defence shield.

We must remember the recent conflict in Iraq; nearly 200,000 people rallied in the streets of Montreal, while only 5,000 in Toronto demonstrated against this type of conflict. This shows that we, in Quebec, are a peaceful nation and people in North America. We wish that the solutions to the different conflicts or to international relations with those the Americans call rogue countries, among others, can be brought in an atmosphere of negotiations, of discussions, and in a fraternal atmosphere.

The motion that the Bloc Québécois put forward today reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should oppose the proposed American antimissile defence shield and, therefore, cease all discussions with the Bush administration on possible Canadian participation.

Why should we cease our discussions with the Bush administration on Canadian participation in this future missile defence shield? Because, if Canada thinks it is sovereign, its citizens should at least be consulted before it gets involved in these discussions. This is what my colleague from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles was saying earlier.

Let me remind you that, during the 2000 election campaign, the platform of the Liberal Party of Canada did not include the antimissile shield. That issue was never mentioned during the campaign in 2000. So today, how can we accept that the federal government, having received no mandate whatsoever from the citizens, would go to the United States to negotiate and talk with the Americans about this? That is exactly what the government is doing.

Also, the new Prime Minister said, on May 12, 2003, and I quote: "Our sovereignty as a nation means we've got to be at the table with the U.S." . According to me, our sovereignty as a nation requires that the people give their opinion on the issue and that members express themselves freely on this very fundamental matter that will have an impact on the life of future generations.

Why should we be against the antimissile defence shield? For three reasons. First, it is useless; second, it implements a technology which could be considered as half-baked; and third, the costs for the development of that system, both for research and for the carrying out of the project, are absolutely stupendous.

● (1555)

Other countries and the United States want to launch a missile system to neutralize the rogue states as we call them, such as Iran, Libya and maybe even Syria, but can we seriously believe that Iran could send a missile all the way to American soil?

Do we really believe there are such weapons in Iran or Iraq, when we have not even found a single hint of weapons of mass destruction there? Today, the American government would be saying that it could be a possibility. I think the answer to my question is no.

There is North Korea, but even in North Korea there is a slim chance of finding such weapons because nothing is happening there.

That project is useless because, if the Americans want to prove that the antimissile defence shield will prevent events like those of September 11, 2001, we can all agree immediately that no antimissile shield could have prevented the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in New York.

Therefore, given the situation in those countries which the Americans call rogue states, no technology, no military equipment and no antimissile shield would help the Americans achieve their goals.

Besides, this technology is defective. Why do I say this? Because before it could be implemented, its reliability was tested. Only five of nine tests were conclusive, and they were carried out in conditions that were considered perfect. The targets the missiles were supposed to strike were known. We can conclude, on the basis of those tests, that this technology is defective.

Finally, we should also conclude, and everybody will agree, that this will represent for Canada and the United States astronomical costs that estimates place between \$60 billion and \$100 billion.

The question that begs to be asked is whether we should not rather invest this money to eliminate poverty in developing countries. Should we not try to fight against the poverty that is endemic in countries like Iran, and Iraq. That way, we may find peaceful solutions to eventual crises?

My conclusion is this: First, we should withdraw from discussions with the Americans and hold consultations with the public.

Second, we think this technology is defective, and its costs are astronomical.

Finally, we do not need this project in Canada because it is utterly useless.

Supply

Before I sit down, I would like to submit three questions to the hon. members for their consideration.

First, is there not a risk this antimissile defence system will reignite the nuclear arms race? We should not forget the reaction China and Russia had when the United States withdrew from the ABM treaty. A few days after that, the Americans announced their intent to implement this defence system. Let us not forget the reactions in China and Russia.

Second, would this defence system have been able to avoid the tragic 9/11 events?

Finally, do Quebeckers and Canadians support this initiative, essentially?

I hope members of Parliament will think about this and support the Bloc Quebecois motion.

● (1600)

[*English*]

Hon. David Pratt (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to note at this point that I will be sharing my time today with the hon. member for Yukon.

I am compelled to rise in the House and speak to the motion we have before us today.

[*Translation*]

The first part of this motion asks us to oppose the proposed American antimissile defence shield.

[*English*]

I can assure members of the House that the Americans are not seeking our approval on matters that concern the defence of their territory and people. Just as we expect them to respect our sovereignty, they expect us to do likewise, and they will go ahead with this system with or without Canada.

Now I come to the second part of the motion which urges the government to cease discussions on possible Canadian participation in the missile defence system.

This too strikes me as nonsensical, for reasons I clearly outlined during the government-sponsored take note debate on Tuesday. Therefore, in response to this motion I will take the opportunity to once again dispel some of the myths concerning ballistic missile defence, myths that are being perpetrated by members who are bent on fearmongering rather than engaging in honest, informed debate, a debate of facts rather than a debate of myths masquerading as facts.

I would like to start by clearly stating that missile defence is not star wars. It never has been and it never will be.

First, star wars, or its real name, as it was known during the Reagan administration, the strategic defence initiative, was not technically feasible. What is now being put in place by the United States is a much more limited system, both in scope and intention. It will use only a small number of land and sea based missile interceptors, nothing like what President Reagan had in mind. Our preliminary assessment is that this system will in fact work.

Supply

Second, the strategic defence initiative was intended to defend against a massive nuclear strike, virtually the entire then Soviet arsenal. The system that we are talking about today will provide limited defence against a limited attack or an unauthorized or accidental launch. In my view there is a clear justification for considering ballistic missile defence. The fact is we are facing threats that we did not face even a decade ago, and it is our duty to explore all options for countering these threats and protecting the safety and security of Canadians in the best way possible. That is what responsible governments do.

Finally, the strategic defence initiative was prohibitively expensive, well beyond what is being projected in terms of this system.

That brings me to the next myth that is being perpetrated by some of my hon. colleagues who have said publicly that this system will cost more than a trillion dollars. We saw that in an ad that the NDP placed in the *Globe and Mail* a while ago. Again, this is both false and irresponsible.

At the current rate of expenditure, which is roughly \$9 billion a year by the Missile Defense Agency, it would take more than a century to spend \$1 trillion on ballistic missile defence, literally more than 100 years. Of course, one of the goals of our discussions with the U.S. is to see what participating in missile defence would cost Canada. I can certainly assure the House that we will not join if we cannot afford to do so.

Some people continue to equate missile defence to the weaponization of space. Quite frankly, it is time to put that misguided notion to rest. It is plain and simply false. The missile defence system we are talking about does not involve weapons in space. It involves a system of land and sea based missile interceptors.

Moreover, members of the House know that Canada has been long opposed to the weaponization of space. The Prime Minister has said that, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has said that, and I have said that. We remain opposed today. The Prime Minister has stated publicly that Canada will not participate in the missile defence system if it contravenes our position, as I mentioned.

The claim that was made in the House yesterday that this system would involve nuclear-tipped missiles is absolutely outrageous. It has no basis in fact and Canadians are not going to buy it.

Missile defence does not involve nuclear weapons in any way. The system will not use interceptors armed with either nuclear or conventional explosives. The technology quite simply is comparable to a bullet hitting another bullet, nothing more. It relies on an interceptor missile hitting a ballistic missile, relying on the kinetic energy of the two missiles hitting each other at high speed to essentially vaporize each other.

Some have said that missile defence will encourage other countries to build more and better missiles, thus sparking an international arms race. I would assure the House that there has been absolutely no evidence of this to date. In fact a number of nations have come forward to express their interest in ballistic missile defence, both in terms of participating in the system or in terms of research and development.

●(1605)

There is at least a chance that faced with the prospect of expending significant amounts of money to gain no advantage, those that might otherwise have decided to acquire missiles and nuclear weapons will desist from doing so once ballistic missile defence is available.

To those who claim that participation in this system is somehow un-Canadian I would ask this. Why is it un-Canadian to look at options to protect the safety and security of our citizens? Why is it un-Canadian to defend our only territory? Why is it un-Canadian to do our part to defend North America?

Indeed, the right of self-protection is an integral part of the UN charter itself. Just as our participation in these discussions does not indicate any shift in our position on the weaponization of space, equally it does not alter our commitment to actively pursue international peace and security.

We remain committed to diplomatic engagement as a means of resolving conflicts, just as we remain committed to multilateral non-proliferation, arm's control and disarmament efforts and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction.

Finally, to those who continue to claim that a decision has already been made, I would ask them to look at the facts. Surely no one in the House would argue against the government's duty to defend our territory and our citizens. In my view this duty obliges us, at a minimum, to explore any option that might enhance our security, including ballistic missile defence. To do anything less would be to shirk our responsibilities to Canadians and to our American neighbour.

The fact is our presence at the table does not commit us to anything. What it does do is give us the information we need to make an informed and rational decision, although it appears those who sponsored the motion would be happy to make such decisions in abject ignorance.

I believe we have a duty to Canadians to be informed on this issue. We should know all the facts and make a principled decision based on our interests and our values.

Let us also be realistic about the fact that when it comes to continental defence, we cannot take an isolationist position. Contrary to what a Bloc member said on Tuesday night, we are not a pacifist country. Over 100,000 Canadian graves in Europe bear silent witness but speak volumes, in my view, about our national commitment to peace, security, justice and democracy.

If our neighbours to the south are at risk, we may very well be at risk too. Simply living on this side of the border does not allow us protection from a missile attack. We must never forget that this system is designed to prevent a potential nuclear explosion delivered by a ballistic missile and the unimaginable human tragedy that would result from such an attack.

My question then is this. Given the volatile international security environment, is it fair to Canadians to vacillate on this issue, to adopt a wait and see, bury our heads in the sand attitude without at least exploring our options? Can we afford to put off making decisions today about the defence systems we may need and want tomorrow?

To anyone who is serious about protecting Canada and Canadians, the answer is clear. We cannot. That is why we are engaged in discussions with the Americans on ballistic missile defence.

• (1610)

[Translation]

In closing, I would like to invite my colleagues to engage in an honest debate on this issue, based on the principles. It is important that Canadians have solid facts to take an informed decision on the issue.

[English]

Needless to say, I do not support the motion today.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I found this speech even less reassuring than what we heard before from the minister.

We know that he wrote a letter to his American counterpart to tell him that Canada agreed to get involved. At the end of his speech, he suggested that we should have a real debate.

If we had wanted to be honest, we should have had a debate here before agreeing with the Americans. The minister has already sold Canada's position, he has already decided that Canada would participate, although no one wants it. I would bet that, in the debate over the war in Iraq, this minister thought that we should have been involved in that war. I am convinced of that.

Finally, it is the message of the President of the United States that is coming out of the minister's mouth. Does he not understand that Quebecers and Canadians do not want to get involved? They do not want to get caught in the system, especially with the current American administration. These are commitments that we will deeply regret. To show his good faith, should the minister not write to his American counterpart to tell him that we have decided to have a discussion in Canada and that we would come back to this issue after having taken a position?

Today, the minister did the opposite. How can he explain this position that goes against the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, which recommended that we do not deal with the missile defence shield, that we do not get involved in any way in this project? What is the minister saying to the young people who do not want a missile defence shield above their head?

[English]

Hon. David Pratt: Mr. Speaker, I do not know how the hon. member draws his conclusions on what Canadians think. There has been some public opinion polling done on this issue. Canadians have demonstrated, I think, a fairly high level of common sense in wanting to deal with potential threats that are out there, as far as ballistic missile defence is concerned.

Canadians in general and Quebecers as well have a lot more sense perhaps than the hon. member does on this issue.

The hon. member repeats on a regular basis that this is Mr. Bush's system. The fact is that it was President Bill Clinton who got the Missile Defense Agency up and running in 1999 as a result of a missile that was fired from North Korea over the Sea of Japan. Up

Supply

until that point, the Americans were certainly not aware that the North Koreans had that level of technology. That is important to note this.

Therefore, this is a response to a threat. I think we are doing the right thing and the prudent thing in engaging in discussions with the Americans, and we will see what comes of these negotiations.

• (1615)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the assertion of the Minister of National Defence that the national missile defence program does not equate to the weaponization of space and that those who say so should stop saying it.

Clearly, I am not one of those who would equate national missile defence to the weaponization of space. I think that is not the view of the overwhelming majority of people who oppose the government's decision to sign on to the negotiations that are now underway.

I have said, and more important many experts have said clearly, that it is not that national missile defence equates to the weaponization of space, but that it will inevitably lead to the weaponization of space, lead to the escalation of the arms race and, in particular, lead us into some very dangerous nuclear ground.

I want to briefly quote from two references in a letter from Canada's former disarmament ambassador, the hon. Senator Doug Roche, and second from a report that comes from the Liu Institute of which one of his colleagues, the former foreign affairs minister, Lloyd Axworthy, has been serving as the CEO and done exhaustive work in this area.

Briefly, with reference to the views expressed by Senator Roche, he has said:

The U.S. Missile Defence Agency plans, by 2008, to test intercepting missiles in space. The Agency intends to link the ground-based system with space capabilities through a "layered system," which will require weapons in space. It is impossible for Canada to sign on to the initial—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I draw to the attention of the member that if the Chair is rising, it is because he is seeking the floor, and traditionally the Chair does get the floor.

I regret, but when members decide to split their time allocation, it also has the effect of reducing, cutting equally, the time for questions and comments. Instead of having 10 minutes we have 5 minutes.

If the minister has something to say in response, I will entertain it.

Hon. David Pratt: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has used the words "signed on", that we have signed on. We have not signed on to anything.

That is why I get a little agitated to say the least in this debate, because the NDP has been purposely misleading Canadians. It has used language such as that used in the ad that Jack Layton placed in the *Globe and Mail*, \$1 trillion. There is absolutely no basis in fact for that piece of non-information. The hon. member yesterday talked about the system using nuclear tipped missiles. That is absolutely absurd. Again, there is no basis in fact.

Supply

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my constituents are split on this issue as they are on many issues. I have a very dynamic riding with constituents who have well thought out views. On this particular issue as on many others, they have expressed views on both sides. With due respect to those who are opposed to joining, I may actually vote for the motion before the House today. There are other members of my constituency who are strongly in support of Canada entering into discussions.

My riding probably has the most vested interest because it is right beside Alaska and some of the missiles are in Fort Greely, only seconds away from our territory. We have quite a vested interest in finding out exactly what is happening there. If we do not engage in discussions with the United States, we will not find out what is happening right next door to us.

We have a great interest in this. We want to know if the United States is going to shoot down missiles over Canada. We want to know what route the missiles are going to take. If a missile is aimed at a Canadian city, we want to know whether or not the system will shoot at it. Canadians would be interested in knowing a lot of things about this and we would find out by entering into discussions. A number of my constituents have that point of view.

Neither myself nor anyone I have talked to wants Canada to invest large amounts of money in this. Our interest is not in the huge investment but more in finding out what it is about and being able to give our input once we see the plans. It is hard to give suggestions such as we do in Norad if we do not know what is actually planned in the system.

For those who may be watching today's debate on TV and are not sure what we are talking about, we are not talking about putting offensive weapons in space. We are talking about some missiles on the ground in the United States which would shoot down a missile headed for a Canadian area. It would blow it up in space. It would be pulverized. I will talk later in my speech about how that missile might get there in the first place.

If a missile was not shot down, it could hit a community and kill thousands of people by way of an explosion. If it was a nuclear missile it would have a much more devastating effect. The speed of the missile that shoots it down pulverizes it in space and any debris burns up in the atmosphere. There is no result on the ground and certainly not thousands of deaths.

If we look at this in the long run, we should ask ourselves what the nature of defence will be in North America in the coming years. We have always out of geographic necessity partnered with the other countries in North America to defend ourselves. That makes obvious sense. In the future we must know what the nature of military action will be, whether it will involve terrorists or other types of military action. World events are always changing. What will be the nature of the technology that will be involved?

It seems evident that technology is progressing away from manned planes. Right now we have an agreement with the United States in Norad which is very useful in protecting North America. We coordinate on the use of planes and the costs to Canada are reduced because of the synergies of that partnership.

If the defence systems move away from that type of technology and Canada is not involved at all, think of the massive expenditures we might have to make in protecting our own borders. Those expenditures could otherwise be used for health, education or social programs.

• (1620)

I talked earlier about whether a missile happened to be coming at us, which of course a number of people said might be problematic. I do not think anyone has suggested that in today's context, as one never knows about the future, anyone is going to launch a full out missile attack on North America. As people have said, the United States have some fairly substantial deterrents. No sane thinking person would do that, although there are a lot of people who do not think quite logically and engage in all sorts of actions in this world. We only have to watch the news. They are not in their best health.

It is unlikely that it is going to be raining missiles and if it were, the system envisioned would not protect people anyway. It is only a few missiles to shoot down a missile that might happen to have been fired by accident or by a rogue terrorist or by a split-off military group that might have got hold of a missile in another country.

One would have to be pretty naive to think there were not thousands of terrorists in the world. It has been well documented. We see them on the news every night. There are military coups all around the world. Missiles are used substantially now in international warfare. It is not inconceivable that criminals, terrorists, nationalists or religious fanatics could come into possession of such a missile and aim it at the United States.

My colleague from Davenport, who spoke very eloquently on this topic, suggested that Canada has no enemies in the world at this time that might aim a missile at us. I would agree with him on that, but as I said, it probably would not be a nation that attacked us. It would probably be an illogical terrorist. Canada, as everyone knows, has had a number of terrorist attacks inside its borders. In fact, one of the largest terrorist attacks in history before September 11 was a terrorist attack in Canada, so it is not inconceivable.

A missile could for whatever reason be aimed at the United States. Terrorists and rogue groups are constantly attacking the United States. The technology is not so precise and it is conceivable that a missile aimed at Seattle or Buffalo could hit Vancouver or Toronto by accident. Certainly if there was fallout involved, that could go into both Canada and the United States.

As I said, out of respect for a number of my constituents I may at this time vote for the motion that is before us today. However, I need a lot more convincing as to how it would be in Canada's best interests to not participate in something that in certain circumstances would certainly protect Canadians.

All of us as members of Parliament with responsibilities for our ridings have to think of a situation, which is not very likely but certainly is conceivable in today's world, as conceivable as September 11 was, that there could be a missile headed for our riding for whatever unfortunate reason possibly causing human suffering in our ridings. Do we want to eliminate that possibility with a system that is not perfected, that works in some cases and does not in others? It would certainly be a heavy weight of responsibility on all our shoulders to protect our constituents.

We must do what we can and at least enter discussions to find out how the system would work, how it would affect our constituents. We must have the ability to provide any input that we as a sovereign country would like to make into the suggested set-up of the system so that it is most beneficial for Canada.

• (1625)

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a principle in law called *stare decisis* and it means what is decided before. Much of what we are talking about is the Canadian character and who we are.

We have to look at what we have decided. I recall that this House was nearly torn apart in the debate over the Bomarc missile and whether the Bomarc missile was going to have a nuclear warhead on it and what was the involvement of Canada. Eventually we decided to have the Bomarc and the government of the day decided to put nuclear heads on those missiles at some point.

We developed the DEW line in the north to defend North America. We entered into Norad. The House will recall that on September 11 it was a Canadian that was in charge of the big button at Cheyenne Mountain.

We are already engaged because we have decided in the past that it is the Canadian character to defend North America and participate. Of course, when there is a new envelope, a new frontier, we must carefully look at that.

However, if we are looking at the Canadian character, we must also look at where we have been, who we are, and what we have previously decided. Is the future question in character with who we are? I think that is the essential question. What is the technical point of the philosophy of the Canadian character? What are we really deciding?

• (1630)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I am impressed at the thoughtful intervention of my colleague.

It has always been the Canadian character to strive for peace through diplomacy, then through peacekeeping if it has to. However, in the long run, if we have to have peace through force, we have illustrated ourselves to be quite capable in joining with our allies to protect our citizens and create a world where citizens in countries that are not protected by their own can also be protected.

Supply

Therefore, in this particular case, once again, we have a potential threat and we have a method of defence where we could go and join our allies.

However, is this the biggest threat to Canada and is it the wisest use of our money? We have very limited moneys for defence, having a very small population. There are a lot of demands on that money.

Is there enough threat of a missile that this is the best use of our defence money, because there are other threats from terrorism and from international crime? Maybe there are investments that would be more likely to protect Canadians.

That is one of the reasons why this is such an intense debate. There is no one in the House who does not want to protect Canadians, but the question is, what is the best technological method of doing that?

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for taking a stand and saying that he will vote for today's motion. During his speech, he said that there would be no weapons in space. Let me quote for him an excerpt from The United States Post Cold War Military Space Policy: "The Bush administration has broader, more grandiose plans for a tiered, multilayered architecture, potentially including weapons deployed in and from outer space".

This means that the new shield will be equipped with weapons capable of intercepting the incoming missiles but, if we read between the lines, it can also mean that attacks could be launched against sites on earth, airplanes or ships.

In general, one does not use a baseball to destroy a ship, aircraft or missile; one uses missiles. Therefore, we can easily conclude that missiles will likely be based in space, ready to intercept missiles that may eventually be launched against the U.S. I would like to hear the member's comments on that.

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. First, I did not categorically say that I would vote with the member. I said there was a good chance I would. I will still be listening to feedback that comes from my constituents.

The point he made about space is definitely true. The United States is certainly researching that as one of the options. Everyone in the House has said that they are against that part of any system. No one in this particular House has said that they support the militarization of space.

The part that we are discussing with the United States is in regard to ground missiles located in the United States that would go up and if there was a missile that happened to be coming over Canada, with perhaps a nuclear warhead, it would pulverize it. We have said that we want no part of that system; we would not participate in that. That has been the government's position so far.

Supply

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Science and Technology; the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville, Firearms Program.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on the motion presented by the Bloc Québécois which reads, “That, in the opinion of this House, the government should oppose the proposed American antimissile defence shield and, therefore, cease all discussions with the Bush administration on possible Canadian participation”.

Of course, this is a votable motion. We will see how the Liberal Party will react. Clearly, if we want to ensure democratic transparency, there should be some form of freedom of expression that all the parties in this House can respect, thereby allowing a free vote on that issue.

First, I want to congratulate my colleague from Saint-Jean, whose riding includes the Saint-Jean military base. There also used to be a military college there, but we know that the government has cut that program too. However, I am told that the military base is doing very well, that there are a lot of activities there and that it is improving all the time. My colleague from Saint-Jean is very close to what is going on in the military and everything that concerns Quebec. He is always keeping the House, and of course the Bloc Québécois caucus, informed of everything that is going on in the military. We thank him for that.

I would like to come back to the defence minister's speech, because I am fundamentally a pacifist, like the majority of the Bloc Québécois members, I would even say all Bloc Québécois members, at least all those I have talked to. Some of them understand how the military system can work in Canada. But the fact remains that we are fundamentally pacifists. I am thinking about my colleagues from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles and from Laurentides.

I would say that, in Quebec, the majority of Quebeckers are fundamentally pacifists. What surprises me are the comments of the Minister of National Defence, who said, “We are not a pacifist country”.

I am stunned by the defence minister's statement but, at the same time, it gives me an idea of what the new Minister of National Defence thinks. When we talk about him, those colleagues of mine who follow a little more closely military activities in Canada and around the world tell me that the minister is a hawk. In theory, a hawk is an animal that is always prepared to attack, and I am told that the new defence minister is a hawk, as we find in the United States. So, he appears to be one of those who think that Canada should become an increasingly militarized country, and he is proposing this shield. But that is not all. Again, the minister said, and I will repeat his words a number of times, “We are not a pacifist country”. I am stunned by this statement.

Of course, Canada is engaged in missions to restore peace. We want all the countries of the world to fully enjoy freedom but, to my knowledge, Canada is not a belligerent country. I have never felt that I was living in a belligerent country, even though I hope that, some day, Quebec will become a country and will be able to truly show the

deeply pacifist nature of Quebeckers. I am stunned to be told today that we are not really a pacifist country.

I am stunned and very concerned. In that same message, the minister said, and I quote, “Missile defence is not star wars. It will use only a small number of land and sea based missile interceptors. Nothing will happen in space”. This was totally contradicted by Lloyd Axworthy, who appeared before the committee. Later on, I will repeat the sentence used by the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles. I am concerned. On the one hand, the message says that the government simply wants us to take part in an operation using interceptors in case of an attack against us, but on the other hand, we are told in the same breath that “we are not a pacifist country”.

If Canada were not a peaceful nation then I could understand that we risk being attacked, but that is not the image I would want the minister of defence to convey, especially in speeches in this House that are heard by all Quebeckers and Canadians.

I cannot believe he said that. I had a hard time understanding why he was considered a hawk, but now I see that the minister of defence is saying it is time for Canada to go to war. Since we are not really a country of peace and we should be a country of war, that must mean he thinks the United States is not a country of peace. What the United States tries to defend all over the world is an attempt to restore balance on the planet.

• (1635)

If allies said, like our minister of defence, that we are not really pacifist, that we are warriors, then I could understand why we would have to gear up to prevent being attacked. If we thought of ourselves as a country of warriors then of course we would have to be able to defend ourselves. That is not how we see it.

That is why I have a great deal of difficulty accepting his explanation that they are only missiles for ground and sea based interceptors, that there will never be nuclear warheads and that this will never have anything to do with star wars.

Earlier, the Minister of National Defence said that Bush did not start this debate, it was Clinton. I will read what Lloyd Axworthy said in his brief to the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs. As far as I know, he is not a member of the Bloc Québécois. He used to be a Liberal minister. He said, “Unlike the very limited, Alaska-based 'national missile defence' (NMD) that the Clinton administration had reluctantly agreed to develop, the Bush administration has broader, more grandiose plans for a tiered, multilayered architecture, potentially including weapons deployed in and from outer space”.

The minister says we should not worry because they are only looking at what Mr. Bush is doing with the project Mr. Clinton had developed. However, experts, with Lloyd Axworthy at the forefront, say that what Bush is contemplating is not at all what Clinton had developed. It will be much more elaborate and will even be space-based.

We are told that there is no mission and no equipment in space, that the interceptors will be on land and sea; well, I am sorry, but I say to the minister quite simply that he is not telling us the whole truth. However, later he said that we would participate in the discussions but it would not commit us to anything. It means he knows already that the project could go all the way to interceptor missiles being based in space, to the building of a real antimissile defence shield, but that his taking part in the discussions does not mean he will say yes.

The only problem is that he did not consult the public about the issue. That is why my colleague, the member for Saint-Jean, is presenting this motion; he is saying that we have to vote immediately on the issue to send a clear message to our Minister of National Defence, a hawk always ready for war, and tell him that we do not want that antimissile defence shield. We are telling him today so that, if ever he sits at a table, he will be able to tell the Americans that we will never partake in that antimissile defence shield the Bush administration is developing. That is the message we must send out today. Otherwise, we will continue to sit, as he does, and wonder and talk.

We will tell the House what happened recently. This are not news from the distant past. On February 16, 2004, the newspapers talked about interim contracts made public by the defence minister, our Minister of National Defence, our hawk ready to go to war, worth \$700,000, to enable us to get involved in tests conducted by the United States with Canadian radar.

The minister is not only taking part in discussions, as he is telling us. On February 16, there was a statement. Some \$700,000 of taxpayers' money, a quarter of which is paid by Quebeckers, will go for testing.

The government may say that it is only having discussions, but it is doing more than that. It is now dipping into our pockets without the authorization of this House. This is the reality.

On February 7, we were told that the budget estimates of the Missile Defence Agency clearly provided for the investment of funds in the development of space interceptors as early as 2005. Moreover, on February 7, before the announcement of \$700,000, we had read many times that possible investments would be made as early as 2005. This is 2004.

And today, quite candidly, the minister, the great hawk ready to go to war, is telling us that we are only discussing. I do not accept this and will never accept it.

• (1640)

I might have accepted this from a national defence minister who wanted to be a fundamentally peace loving person. However, I know now that our national defence minister is a warring hawk, who tells us in his speech in this House, today, on February 19, 2004, "We are not really a peaceful country". I am sorry, but I do not believe him

Supply

when he is telling us that he will sit at the table just to discuss. I really believe what is written in the newspapers, that \$700,000 are now invested by the Government of Canada, without Parliament being able to decide on this issue.

In closing, I thank my colleague from Saint-Jean. At least we will have the chance, in the Bloc Québécois, to vote on a motion to say no, never. For the Quebeckers that we represent, with my colleagues from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Laurentides, Saint-Jean and all the other colleagues from the Bloc Québécois, we will vote against any involvement and any investment in the missile defence shield.

It is not true that we will let our hawkish Minister of National Defence represent us at any table and continue to say of Canada that "We are not really a pacifist country". We will not let him continue his discussions with the Americans. I will continue to repeat what he said in his speech, "We must protect the safety of Canadians".

He is talking on behalf of Quebeckers when he says, "We are not really a pacifist country". It is for the sake of security. That is what he said earlier. Public safety must be ensured.

Naturally, if our country truly wants to go to war, we must protect ourselves. I can understand that. The only problem is that I consider myself to be a pacifist at heart. I will never allow the hawkish Minister of National Defence to represent me.

Obviously, I will vote in favour of the Bloc's motion. I will tell this Minister of National Defence that I will never agree to have him say of Canada, at any table anywhere in the world, "We are not really a pacifist country". I will never agree to this. I will never agree to him saying it on my behalf.

I am a Quebecker and a pacifist, as are most Quebeckers. I hope that we will be able to send this message. Our only strength is our ability to put forward motions in this House. I hope that the Liberal Party will allow its members to vote freely tomorrow so they will understand the message the Minister of National Defence is sending on their behalf in the name of public safety.

I will continue with this. I agree that there have been serious problems with public safety in Canada since September 11. However, the Liberal Party, which has governed the country for 27 of the past 40 years, has been a part of these problems. It chose not to invest in domestic security. The RCMP, which handled airport security, was relieved of that responsibility in the 1990s for financial reasons. Private companies were given this responsibility.

We have been soft on border protection. We have thousands of kilometres to protect, but we decided not to make the investment. A choice was made. The United States tried to warn us. They kept asking us to deal with national security issues. But because we are a pacifist country, the Liberals believed it was pointless to invest in national security. We were not under any threats, because we never attack anyone and we are not a belligerent country.

Supply

After 9/11, we realized that we are not immune to terrorist attacks. The problem the Government of Canada is facing is more a visibility issue. Although it refused to invest in domestic security, it was trying to sell Canada, as we are seeing now with the sponsorship scandal. Hundreds of millions of dollars were invested in ads instead of national security.

If the government had done its job and invested in national security, if it had bought adequate uniforms for our men so that they would not stand out like so much greenery in the middle of the desert, Quebeckers and Canadians would probably feel better protected by the federal government and enjoy more effective homeland security.

But that is not the case. Since 2001, we have been the laughing stock of the whole world. There were news stories about our army. If we do not fund our troops properly, we will lose them. That is the reality. We do not have an army. We have a group of people trained to take part in missions and try to restore peace.

• (1645)

I hope that we will give them the money they need to do their work, which is to participate in peacemaking missions, because we want every country in the world to be able to live in freedom and safety. This is what we want, freedom for every man and every woman on this planet.

This is why we are prepared to participate and to invest in this. It is not a matter of going to war. It is not a matter of giving a mandate to a national defence minister who, I will never repeat it enough in this House, has told us “we are not a pacifist country.” It is not by giving money to a defence minister who is ready to go to war that we will get what we believe in, which is world peace.

The last thing we need to do in order to achieve peace is to prepare for war. This is the message that the Bloc Québécois wants to send. All that I and my colleagues from Saint-Jean, from Laurentides and from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles want to say to Quebeckers is that we cannot support the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars, that could well turn into several billions of dollars, in a missile defence system.

All we want is to be able to regain a little bit of our domestic security, so as to feel safer, and to be able to invest in something useful. Earlier, of course, I was talking about land borders. There are also naval borders. We have to be able to rely on a certain level of security in our ports and on internal security in our airports.

This is what we have to work on. We have to invest in people, in men and women who work to ensure security within the country before we invest enormous amounts of money trying to help the Americans.

Finally, the major problem with the Liberal Party is that it believes, like the new Minister of National Defence, who is a hawk ready to go to war, that it can satisfy the Americans, who only want one thing, and that is to make us pay part of the costs. It cost them a lot to go to war in Iraq. Now, they hope that Canada will pay its

share, because we said no to war, and we Quebeckers are proud of that decision.

Of course, the Americans are trying to make Canada pay. Their new approach to achieve that goal is to get Canada to pay its share in the antimissile defence system. They will then save money and this will allow them to pay off the deficit incurred with the war in Iraq.

That was not my choice. We are not the ones who decided to go to war in Iraq. Therefore, we should not have to indirectly pay for something that we never wanted to do directly. This is what the new Minister of National Defence is trying to convince us to do, in the name of public protection and security, by making all Canadians worried.

I listened to the minister today. He told us that we have to protect ourselves from attacks. He is saying that there are currently missiles pointed at us. I cannot believe what I am hearing.

When he tells us that we are not really a pacifist country, I can understand that if he thinks we are a warlike country, he will tell the public “We are not really a pacifist country, so that means we are a warlike one. Watch out, we are open to attack”.

That is his message. In order to avoid attack, we will take part in the creation of this missile defence shield, which starts out with a system of land and sea based missile interceptors. After that will come missiles in space. That is what it is all about, in the long run.

For those who are listening to us, the picture is this: we start with land and sea based missiles, then move on to missiles in space. That is the Bush plan. Once he has us hooked, of course we will have to keep paying at every stage of this plan, what I would call Bush's machiavellian plan.

When we pull out, we will be accused of all manner of wrongs by the Americans for not taking part. Why not settle it right away? Why not say “Let us make it clear. We are not taking part. We will not put one red cent into the missile defence shield”. I would add that our reason is pure and simple: to protect our internal security.

Major amounts of money need to be spent on the men and women responsible for our internal security. We are short staffed. Our army is badly paid, underpaid, ill equipped. We need to start by bolstering what we have, before putting big money into new projects just to please President Bush. Bush is out to save money because the war in Iraq is costing him a lot more than expected.

• (1650)

What is more, things are going badly for him in the polls. This shows that the Americans are also rethinking their position on how President Bush decided to take his country to war.

In closing, let me just say that I will never accept the Minister of Defence for Canada telling other countries in the world what he has told us today in this House: that we are not really a pacifist country.

Supply

●(1655)

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me congratulate my colleague, the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel. He was quite convincing. I would like him to comment further on a topic he did not develop at length and that is the whole issue of democratic deficit in this debate.

The defence minister spent \$700,000 or will do so shortly, so that we can take part in this project. He goes everywhere saying that we agree with the whole thing. He wrote a letter to his American counterpart which was perfectly clear. He even wants to change Norad's terms of reference. He says we want to take part in the project. Even his general in charge at Norad, the Canadian general, said, and I quote:

I would not say that the whole thing is a done deal, but it seems that Canada essentially agrees with the project and wants to be part of it.

The problem is that a handful of civil servants and military people are establishing the national defence policy and the foreign affairs policy. This is quite a break from before when we could affirm our credibility with the peacekeeping missions the member referred to earlier.

The Bloc Québécois had to bring the issue to the House. Does my colleague not agree that there must be a serious democratic deficit when the Bloc Québécois has to do the work, has to show us that what is happening here is that they are modifying the defence policy and the foreign affairs policy?

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, first I thank my colleague from Saint-Jean for his question. Just in the way that he asks his question and elaborates on it, it is clear that he knows this issue very well, that as the member for Saint-Jean, with the military base, this is familiar ground to him. I congratulate my colleague for keeping up on this issue and having such a clear understanding of it.

With respect to the democratic deficit, things are getting clearer and clearer. The government may tell its members to vote with their conscience, but the defence minister, who has responsibility for the issue, must tell them the truth. I hope that the Liberals will choose to hold a free vote on the Bloc Québécois' motion. As for me, I hope that we will have been able to convince them that we must immediately bury this project and tell the Americans that we are not interested in investing in the missile defence shield. I hope we will be able to do so.

As for the rest, I hope that the defence minister will not be successful in convincing the members. I have learned today what a hawk is. He is someone who is ready to go to war. Now I understand. The only problem I have as a Quebecker is that I am basically a pacifist. I have never shared the views of the minister who said, and I quote him again, "We are not a pacifist country". I never believed that. I am sure a lot of Quebeckers never thought they would one day hear a defence minister say, in this House and throughout the world, that Canada is not a pacifist country.

I do hope democracy will prevail, that democratic balance will be restored among the Liberals, who would then be able to support the motion put forward by the Bloc Québécois.

[English]

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was not going to rise but I really do have to because what we may have here is a difference of opinion on the meaning of the word "pacifist".

If the member means that Canada is a peace-loving nation, then I would agree with him. If the member means pacifist in the sense that we will do anything to avoid conflict, even setting aside our principles, then I would greatly argue with him.

This country has shed blood many times in the past to do what is right and to stand up for people who could not defend themselves around the world, and we continue to do that. We are doing it right now in Afghanistan. Anybody who thinks the mission in Afghanistan is peacekeeping is fooling themselves. However our soldiers, our young men and women, are willing to go there and put their lives on the line because they know what they are doing is right. They are trying to help people who cannot defend themselves.

When I hear any member in the House trying to argue that we are a nation of pacifists, that is absolute nonsense. He should talk with veterans who gave of themselves, who came home missing limbs, who were torn apart emotionally as well as physically, and who put everything on the line for this country in the first world war, the second world war and in many conflicts since. Our military continues to do so in engagements like the one presently underway in Afghanistan.

●(1700)

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. I would point out to him that Canada is always prepared to get out there and restore peace anywhere in the world. But when the Minister of National Defence rises in this House and says that we are not really a pacifist country, I have a problem with that. If we are not a pacifist country, then we are a belligerent country, and never will I accept that.

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): On the issue of the veterans, we heard the horrendous story last week of our government not providing sufficient funds for tombstones for veterans, most of them from the second world war. We have built up a five year waiting list. I would like to ask my colleague from the Bloc about this. Does it not make more sense to simply provide for those types of needs of our veterans, who have fought and have died for our country, rather than deploy the kinds of resources that we are going to deploy in star wars?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. He is absolutely right.

Our veterans and our troops need help. Some of them need better wages. Others need better equipment. More resources are required for our national security needs. Before taking part in the antimissile defence shield project, we should invest in our real needs. I totally agree with my hon. colleague's recommendation on that issue.

Supply

Hon. André Harvey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we can all appreciate that for the Bloc, exaggeration is a means of political survival.

In our close and privileged relations for over 50 years with the Americans, both commercially and militarily, with the agreement on NORAD, the minister clearly specified that it would be in our best interests to enter into negotiations in order to get to know the antimissile program better.

If we really want to defend the interests of the Canadians, it would seem perfectly logical to me to attend meetings to get to know precisely what this program entails.

I would like to ask my colleague if he does not think that it would be reasonable to participate in negotiations to maximize our information, and maybe one day be able to participate in the development of a system that would include land and marine facilities. This seems perfectly logical to me. We have to collect information before we can make a decision. We do not need to snub our neighbours.

In the event of problems in our commercial relations with the Americans, they are still the first to protest and to resort to exaggeration and demagoguery, be it about softwood lumber or in other sectors. I think that while maintaining close relationships with the Americans, it would be in our best interests to study the project with them, and perhaps to participate in the development of a system to ensure our safety. Let us at least obtain the information. This is a minimum requirement before we can make a decision. What does my colleague think about that?

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I will not speak my mind, but I must tell my colleague that if you invest \$700,000 before you sit down at the table to discuss, you are in fact agreeing ahead of time. I find that very problematic. This is how things work here and this is how the Liberal Party has been governing the country for 27 years. For 40 years now, they have come to the House with done deals.

For all the reasons mentioned by my learned NPD colleague, we must invest our money in the compensation of veterans. We must put our money in our army and our national security and it would be quite easy to say that to our neighbours.

We could say to our neighbours: before we even begin the discussion, we want to tell you that we cannot afford to participate in your antimissile defence shield project. If we just made that decision and passed the motion by the Bloc Québécois, today or next week, then I would agree that we could sit at the table with the Americans, but only provided they are well aware of our position and know that we cannot afford to take part in that operation.

• (1705)

[*English*]

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Fanshawe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join this debate on missile defence for the second time this week. I am reminded of the old statement: it seems like déjà vu all over again. It was just two days ago that we had this debate, but I recognize the Bloc's right to put this important topic to the House once again.

As for the Bloc member who just spoke, I do not know if he is being disingenuous. I recognize that English is probably not his first language, but my colleague from the Conservative Party took up this point and I would like to pursue it briefly.

A pacifist, as I think the term is commonly understood, is someone who will not resort to the use of physical violence, even in self-defence. Perhaps the most famous example one could think of is Mahatma Gandhi.

If my colleague opposite was serious, and I assume he was—I listened to his comments—he surely cannot mean that Canada is now or ever has been a pacifist country under that understanding of the word.

My colleague from the Conservative Party, the defence critic, spoke very well and very eloquently in pointing out that Canada lost thousands of lives in the first world war, the second world war and the Korean war specifically because we are not a pacifist country. The defence minister is exactly correct in saying that. Any student of Canadian history knows that Canada, when pushed to the wall, as a matter of last resort has used and will continue to use military intervention to defend our own national self-interest or to come to the defence of other helpless people.

We have a proud military history in this country. I would recommend, with all due respect to the hon. member opposite who made those comments, that he perhaps may want to talk to the family of General Georges Vanier or he may want to consult with the very famous military group from his province, the Van Doos.

We are not a pacifist country. It just boggles my mind to hear the Minister of National Defence attacked for pointing out our proud military history. The member also attacked the defence minister for being a hawk, for being somebody who is anxious to go to war. That could not be further from the truth.

With all due respect, let me say this to my hon. colleague. I am sure that the Bloc defence critic, for whom I have great respect, will well recognize that it has been a long time since a backbench member of Parliament was appointed Minister of National Defence and will recognize that no member is more capable and more prepared to take up the job than my hon. colleague, the Minister of National Defence. He is not a hawk, but he understands the basic lesson of history, which is all too often forgotten.

That lesson, of course, is that if a country or a nation really wants peace, then it had better be prepared, as a last resort and if necessary, to go to war. When that lesson has not been followed, we have had the most calamitous violence and wars we have ever experienced throughout our history as a global people.

I just think the member was inaccurate and frankly far too harsh on the Minister of National Defence. There is no one in this country who is anxious to go to war, but we must, as a sensible people, be prepared to defend ourselves if necessary. That is what this discussion is all about.

After all, we are looking at the possibility of joining our Norad partner, the United States of America, in a defensive missile system for North America. We are in negotiations to get the facts from the United States to see whether or not it is in Canada's self-interest as a country to go into this defensive ballistic missile defence system.

As for making a decision of that import, this motion says we should just say no right now. With all due respect to the Bloc motion, how can we take a decision on something of such national importance as the defence of this country and this continent without having more facts? We have to at least participate in the negotiations to get all the facts we can from the United States. That is what we are engaged in.

● (1710)

Then and only then, and after full debate—and this is the second one this week in the House—and after further debate and consultation with the Canadian people, when the government feels the time is right, it will take a decision on whether to participate or not participate.

Based on what I know I would think we are probably likely to participate, but that decision has not been made. It is certainly wrong to preclude making the decision at the right time by throwing up our hands now and saying, “We just say no, we do not want the facts”. Let me tell members why that would be so dangerous and so wrong.

I had the honour to be recently elected chair of the defence committee and I am looking forward to taking up that assignment again. I had that assignment in 1999 and 2000. The defence committee held an extensive set of hearings on the question of national missile defence. In the course of that, we heard from many witnesses right across the spectrum. What became very clear in the course of those hearings was this simple fact. The United States of America has irrevocably made a decision that it will create a system of national missile defence, with Canada's participation or without Canada's participation.

I would submit that this leaves two possibilities for Canada. Either we agree to participate with the United States or we do not. This is our defence partner, as it has been since the second world war. This is the country that we have a defence organization with, a bilateral treaty—

An hon. member: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pat O'Brien: If the member for Windsor—St. Clair would just let me finish, I will be glad to take his questions.

We have a defence partnership with the United States. It is called Norad. It was signed formally in 1957. I think it would behoove this country to continue that defence partnership, but the fact of the matter is that if we choose not to, the United States is going to go ahead anyway. It is going to set up a system and run it unilaterally.

Would it be best for us to participate, to be at the table and try to influence that decision making, or would it be best to simply to opt out? I would submit that it would be more sensible to participate and try to influence the decisions that are taken.

Supply

Let me remind the House of what the witnesses told us in 1999 and 2000. We heard from dozens of witnesses. The choice was given to witnesses. They were asked what would be best. Would it be best for the United States to have a missile defence system and run it unilaterally or to have a missile defence system under the auspices of Norad with Canadian participation? Which would be best? Not a single witness chose unilateral American participation.

I see I am coming to the end of my time. I had a chance to speak on this earlier this week, and I look forward to engaging Canadians in further discussion as we pursue the option of maybe joining in this missile defence system.

The Deputy Speaker: Before proceeding to private members' business, the Chair will hear a point of order from the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you would seek unanimous consent on the part of the members present in the House this evening for me to table the results of a Pollara poll that was conducted in November of last year.

Two nights ago, my colleague referred to the results of this poll on the future of the Canada-U.S. relationship. My colleague for Okanagan—Coquihalla referred to it in his remarks and the member of Parliament for Halifax asked earlier in the debate today if I would table the results of that poll. I am prepared to do that with the consent of the House.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River have the unanimous consent of the House to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—THE PROPOSED AMERICAN ANTIMISSILE DEFENCE SHIELD

The House resumed consideration of the motion

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to the order made earlier today, every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply is deemed to have been put, and the recorded division is deemed to have been demanded and deferred until Tuesday, February 24 at the end of government orders.

● (1715)

[*English*]

It being 5:15 p.m., the House will now proceed to consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***INCOME TAX ACT**

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC) moved that Bill C-246, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (child adoption expenses), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a great pleasure for me to rise tonight to debate private member's Bill C-246, in my name.

The legislation, if passed by the House, will allow parents adopting a child a federal tax deduction of up to \$7,000 for the expenses they incur throughout the adoption process.

Each year approximately 2,000 children are adopted within Canada and another 2,000 Canadian parents adopt children from other countries around the world. Adopting a child is not quite a selfless, act but it is very close to it.

Selfless indicates that a parent gains nothing from adopting a child, but any adoptive parent will say that the love and joy an adopted child brings into his or her life is a tremendous reward. Many children and all of society benefit from the act of adoption, and I believe that our tax system should acknowledge this contribution made by adoptive parents.

There are so many circumstances under which a child is adopted, but in numerous cases these children have been orphaned, abandoned, neglected, emotionally or physically abused, starved or are in fear of their very lives. Sadly, there are children living like this in Canada, as well as around the world.

Sometimes they are so young that they are unaware of their incredible fortune at being adopted into a caring environment. If they are old enough to be even somewhat aware of their circumstances, we can imagine their joy at being welcomed into a warm and caring family committed to supporting them emotionally and financially. It is the best gift these children could ever receive.

It is a gift also to society. We have a collective responsibility to provide the best opportunities possible for homeless, neglected, abused and orphaned children. In many countries almost nothing is done to help these children. In Canada, although there are various government funded programs and services that attempt to provide for these children, it simply is not enough.

Children need to be loved and know that they are wanted. Study after study has concluded that children raised in such an environment are more likely to become happy, productive members of society, contributing to the future, well-being and prosperity of their communities and their country.

As for adoptive parents, I have received so many letters from parents attempting to convey their unspeakable joy that an adoptive child has brought into their lives. Some of these parents deliberately chose adoption to build or expand their families. Some have chosen to reach out to special needs children who require more than what is offered under public care.

For other parents, adoption is their only alternative if they are unable to have children of their own. Often they have endured many

years of unsuccessful attempts to have a child through such methods as in vitro fertilization. Incidentally, in vitro fertilization is a very expensive procedure, but fortunately couples who undergo this process are allowed a financial reprieve under medical expenses claimed on their income tax.

However, there is no such accommodation for couples seeking to add to their family through adoption. Adoption is a very expensive process. It can cost between \$10,000 and \$15,000 to adopt a child, even within Canada. For international adoptions, parents can pay \$20,000, \$30,000 or more.

The adoption process requires parents to pay for legal fees, psychological studies, travel expenses, if the child is not located in the parents' region, agency fees and, for international adoptions, expenses related to the child's immigration to Canada.

These are the adoption expenses that I propose should be eligible for a federal tax deduction. The maximum deduction under my bill would not exceed \$7,000. Although that figure may not cover the entire cost of an adoption, it would help relieve some of the financial burden of adoptive parents.

The \$7,000 is also a reflection of precedence set in tax deductions and credits offered in North America. The Province of Quebec, I am pleased to note, offers a tax credit equal to 30% of the total adoption expenses, with a maximum credit of \$6,000. The U.S. government recently expanded its adoption tax credit to a maximum of \$10,000 U.S.

● (1720)

In Alberta in 1999-2000, the average cost to couples adopting through private agencies was roughly \$7,000. I believe this amount to be a fair start in acknowledging the contribution of adoptive parents.

Since I first tabled this legislation in 2001, parents, social workers and adoption agencies from across the country have written, e-mailed and telephoned to voice their support and stress the importance of this legislation. I would like to read some excerpts from letters I have received from adoptive parents. I believe it will help to convey in words better than my own what is at stake in this debate tonight.

From a couple in Orangeville, Ontario, who will soon welcome a child from China into their lives, came the following heartfelt comment:

The burden of costs associated with international adoption are so very high, and as a couple who have had no luck in conceiving, we feel this is our last option in being able to have the privilege of raising a family. Let's allow other families to adopt as well, giving the children a chance at a wonderful family life.

Another parent e-mailed me to pose the following question:

How many people are out there that want to do the right thing in providing a loving home to an orphan but can't risk financial ruin doing it?

A mother of two girls wrote to say that although she was able to adopt through the public system, she believed that Canada must do all it could to encourage adoption by deferring some expenses. She views an adoption tax deduction as part of:

—overall strategy to find more permanent homes for the waiting children in our country, and for foreign adoptions. It is very expensive to adopt, but I think that as Canadian families, where we can, we need to reach out a hand to the children. It sure isn't their fault that there is a war going on, or that their parents are dead.

Another mother of five children, one of whom was adopted last January from Russia, wrote that a tax deduction would:

—not only help Canadians in deciding to pursue their dreams of adoption, it will save lives. There is little or no hope for these children and I am confident in saying each child that is adopted is new hope for the future.

When this mother's 12-year-old son wrote to the former Prime Minister, he stated, "Children are our future and Canada depends upon them". I certainly hope that this is the position of the government and if so, tonight I am giving it an opportunity to make good on that commitment to children.

This is far from the first time that this legislation or similar legislation has been introduced in the House. My former colleague in that last Parliament from Calgary Centre, Mr. Eric Lowther, introduced the bill in 1999. It was virtually the same. A Bloc Quebecois member also introduced adoption expenses legislation that year in an effort to ensure the federal tax system acknowledged adoptive parents, just as they were under Quebec's tax system.

As I am saying, this is not new. This is not a new concept. Other members have suggested it before. I have put it forward a number of times in the past. Unfortunately, with our system for private members' legislation it has not been debated a lot in the past, but I am pleased that I and members of the House have the opportunity to debate it this evening.

As I have said in my remarks, I have been overwhelmed at the support this has out in the real world among people who have to incur these growing costs of adopting children. I do not understand why we have not had something in place even before this to assist these parents with that financial burden.

I hope all parties in the House will take a close look at this legislation and recognize that our tax system's failure to alleviate the financial burden of adoptive parents is an oversight and that we have the ability here and now to correct. Let us put some of the money used to pay for adoption back in the pockets of parents so they can better afford to care for and raise their young children.

• (1725)

Ms. Paddy Torsney (Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask a question. Certainly some of my friends, some of constituents especially, have found themselves in the situation where they are paying very high adoption fees. I know this relief would be important to them, in spite of what the finance department probably will tell us why it cannot be done.

How does the member reconcile this with the people who are paying exorbitant fees to produce a child through reproductive technologies? How would all those deductions, which are quite beyond the medical expenses that people can claim, be reconciled?

Private Members' Business

Many of the constituents first go through all the expenses for reproductive technologies. Then they go through private or public adoptions. Many public adoptions now are not that inexpensive. However, it is the same group of people who are sometimes spending \$40,000 and \$50,000 to try to have a family. I know many of my constituents have been in this situation and, given my age bracket, many of my friends are as well.

Could the member suggest how we reconcile that with this issue?

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I thank my Liberal colleague from across the way for the question. It is well thought out and it is a good question.

Ultimately, it cannot be reconciled. We have to start somewhere. What I am doing, by putting forward this bill, is recognizing what I believe is a very real need out there. Adoptive parents provide a service, as I have tried to lay out in my remarks, not only obviously to that child or children who they adopt, but to society in general because, as all of us recognize, children are the future of our country.

I also noted in my remarks that some of the expenses attached to procedures like in vitro fertilization are tax deductible, but I readily recognize that the hon. member's comments are accurate and that not all are. In some cases, where people are repeatedly trying every conceivable scientific method to conceive, to have a child naturally, it gets very expensive. I would certainly be willing, as a private member, to look at ways in which we could address that further than the existing tax deductions that are available for those procedures.

As so often is the case in this chamber, I do not want to see the government use things like that, and I am sure the member would not either, as an excuse not to do anything.

I have been here 10 years, a decade. If I say it quickly, it does not seem like a long time, but I have been very frustrated a lot of the times in that 10 years. I have felt that different initiatives, regardless of party or partisan backing, which have come forward should have been supported, and they made good common sense. Too often I have heard the government say that it could not do it because it would open a Pandora's box and others would be lining up with their hands out wanting help.

I do not know what arguments will be used by the government member who will speak tonight against doing this, but if I hear that again tonight, that is sad. To me it is a weak argument to say to all adoptive parents across Canada who are incurring ever increasing costs that we cannot help them out because, if we do we, will have to address some other issue. Let us address each one individually. If the need is there, it is warranted and it makes sense, then let us do it.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Andy Burton (Skeena, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just very quickly because the member for Prince George—Peace River almost answered my question. As somebody who was adopted as a very young child, I can really empathize with this type of legislation. It was a long time ago, obviously, and in a different world really. It was during World War II in England. Times change, but times also tend to remain the same, as we have problems around the world.

I currently have a couple in my riding who are looking at adopting from Russia. It will cost them probably in excess of \$40,000. It is a lot of money. They obviously really want to have a family, and that is why I was adopted. My parents really wanted to have a family. In fact they adopted a sister for me as well.

People who adopt really want to have these families and are willing to go to any lengths. Therefore, any legislation that would assist them financially, because of that financial burden, would be very useful.

The only question for the member is this. What reasonable rationale could be put forward, any kind of reasonable rationale, not to support this legislation?

• (1730)

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, we will be hearing from the government side shortly and I am sure the hon. member who will speaking will feel that he is being reasonable.

The only excuse I have ever heard in the past is that we cannot set up individual exemptions, and yet we have seen it done for other expenses that are tax deductible. I therefore do not think that is a rational or reasonable excuse for not addressing this very real issue.

The research I have done has shown that there are roughly 20,000 children in Canada today growing up in permanent government care. They are either bouncing in and out of foster homes or they are in some form of government care. If we could somehow, through adopting this measure, have it assist other parents who might be deterred from adopting one of those children because of the huge financial cost, then why would we not do it? It is not difficult to make this tax deductible.

The other thing I learned, which is sort of the human side of the whole issue, is that foster children who are waiting for adoption are, in many cases, bouncing in and out of foster homes on short term stays and then go back into government care and institutions. This is not always the best scenario.

I thank God that I was raised in a good, solid Canadian farm home environment. I am not saying that I was not disciplined from time to time when I got out of line but I had a very loving home. I had four siblings. It was a great environment being raised on a farm in the Peace River country of northeastern British Columbia. I was very fortunate but these other children are not.

When foster children talk about the chance of being adopted, they refer to it as a forever family. That is how they differentiate between a foster home or staying in an institution and having the chance to adopt to a permanent family.

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the hon. member for his efforts in presenting Bill C-246. It puts us all in a bit of a

conflict as a result of a natural response to this deduction. What the bill actually asks for is \$7,000 for child adoption expenses.

I must confess to a personal conflict here. I am the father of five children. My oldest child is adopted. I have two stepchildren and two children by other means shall we say. I am kind of the quintessential Canadian family of hers, mine and ours. This goes in part to my argument here. I am not sure how I would preference one child over the other.

Clearly, the day that my wife and I adopted our oldest son, who is now 23, when he was three or four days old, was easily one of the high days of my life. I am extraordinarily proud of him. In fact, he was here with me on break week. He is a student at the University of Toronto and this is study week. I cannot imagine loving him more. I am extraordinarily proud of my adopted son.

However I do have some difficulties with the bill. I want to share those difficulties with members and open up the debate a little bit more.

I want to commend adoptive parents generally for their willingness to take children in and raise them as their own. It is truly an extraordinary experience. I would heartily recommend it to people who are thinking along those lines. However I also know there is travail and there are expenses associated with adoption.

I am absolutely convinced of the hon. member's best intentions in bringing the bill forward but I think I have the unhappy task of raising some of the concerns that would normally arise when we are considering a proposal such as this, which is \$7,000 for expenses specifically related to adoption.

I know members will recall the happy day on which the House passed the Canada child tax benefit, which was a landmark bill for Canadian families. It was one of the first post-deficit initiatives of the government and one that has almost taken on a life of its own. At this point, 3.2 million families benefit from the program, representing something in the order of about 5.7 million children, which, by anyone's standards, is a significant number of people affected by the initiative of the House and the government.

Initially it started out as a \$9 billion program and then, with the enhancements in the last budget of about \$150 per child starting in July 2003 and further increases in July 2005 and 2006, the government will have enriched the program to the tune of almost an additional billion dollars by 2007.

Members will also recall that these changes, along with the five year tax reduction plan, effectively mean that there will be an annual benefit for the first child in July 2004 of \$2,719, and is projected to reach \$3,243 by 2007. Again, that is a substantial benefit to Canadian families. I would emphasize the point that it is all Canadian families, whether their children arrive by means of adoption, by birth or simply arrive in the home by other means.

To be sure, total support for families will have more than doubled between 1996 and 2007. As I said earlier, this program is projected to reach \$10 billion.

I know hon. members will appreciate that educating children is extraordinarily expensive these days. I have one child at the University of Toronto studying philosophy and physics and I have another child at the University of Windsor studying arts. I am anticipating another child will be going to a private school. I have more than a personal experience with trying to find post-tax dollars for the expenses that are involved in raising children.

● (1735)

I take advantage of the registered education savings plan, and I encourage others to do so. I suggest to those who are listening to look that up on the website. It is a pretty significant initiative on the part of the government.

I will now turn to Bill C-246. The problem with C-246 is that it kind of runs into a public policy wall of the government trying to not make preferences among classes of families.

As I indicated, I appreciate that there are various personal expenses incurred when one adopts. I have incurred those expenses myself. There are fees for agencies, sometimes for lawyers, travel expenses, home visits, et cetera. All of those are significant expenses. Equally though, a family that births a child has a unique set of expenses as well, not necessarily shared by an adoptive family. Again, I have been on that side of the equation.

It would not be fair to ask taxpayers at large to pay for the tax relief for a specific set of personal expenses of others. The Government of Canada should not be in the business of making distinctions among families and the choices that they make. A child is a child is a child.

At issue here is that some adoption expenses are in fact discretionary expenses, just as other child expenses are discretionary. If the bill were to go through, an adoptive parent would have possible discretionary expenses that would not necessarily be available to parents who acquire their children by means other than adoption.

It is true that adoptive parents do sometimes incur significant costs. I have heard the stories, much like the hon. member opposite, of trips to China and various other places, which are particularly expensive, but so also do other parents incur significant costs. The example of in vitro fertilization was raised and we do recognize a particular medical expense for that procedure. There are other examples of expenses in reproductive technologies that, frankly, are not recognized. Again, how does the Government of Canada preference one family over another?

Quite simply, some adoptions are quite expensive while others are not. Similarly, some family pregnancies are quite expensive while others are not. The Government of Canada, again, should not be in the business of giving preference to one family over another.

Indeed, other children arrive in families by various means, whether they are adopted or they are birthed, and they become children in the family, yet their expenses are not necessarily recognized. It follows then that we should not expect or ask

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Canadians to finance these types of personal and discretionary expenses through their tax dollars.

It is virtually impossible to separate discretionary and non-discretionary elements of the costs associated with raising children. There is also considerable variation in the amount that different families devote to their children, even at similar income levels.

In consideration of these variations and the amounts devoted to children, support for children is generally provided as a pre-determined benefit. In other words, the way the Government of Canada approaches children, generally, is that a child is a child is a child, a family is a family is a family, and the Canadian child tax benefit is available to all. Therefore, whether it is at the \$2,000 level or the \$3,000 level, it is available to all, but we do not, as a matter of policy, make distinctions whether a child is adopted or whether a child is acquired by other means.

The government recognizes that parents should receive financial assistance to help ensure that their needs are met. I believe and I hope I have at least demonstrated that the government places a high priority on investing in children. However it would not be appropriate to ask taxpayers at large to subsidize adoption expenses through the tax system in preference to others.

● (1740)

Regrettably, I must urge hon. members not to support this initiative. Nevertheless, I want to commend the hon. member for bringing forward this bill because it does face us squarely with some difficulties that are in the system.

However, as I said, a child is a child is a child. From the government's standpoint, we must treat all families equally.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this bill brought forward by my colleague from Prince George—Peace River.

This subject is of particular concern to me. I have had the opportunity to introduce a bill along the same lines, but with different amounts.

I was concerned with this situation because two good friends of mine went through an international adoption process. I have helped them in their efforts. I can tell you that this is a difficult process, particularly with certain countries.

I would like to say a few words about my good friend Linda Picard from Chateau-Richer who adopted a Russian boy. His name is Kyril and he is now about 7 years old. He was one and a half when he arrived here. He adapted very well to the Quebec culture. I met him recently and he was telling me that he was at the top of his class in French. He still has relations with people of the Russian community in Quebec. He is seven years old and he is fluent in Russian and in French. This is quite an achievement.

I am also thinking of a good friend of mine who lives on my street, France Vézina and her spouse, Patrick Boilay.

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International adoption often comes to mind following television reports that show human dramas. A human drama, whether it is a famine or a civil war that affects adults, is always hard to witness, it is a terrible situation. However, when young children are also suffering, it affects us even more, particularly when we ourselves have children.

In the case that I was referring to, that of France and Patrick, they had seen a documentary on the television program *Le Point*, which showed orphanages in China where young girls would literally die. As we know, generally speaking, women and girls in China do not enjoy the same social status as men. This is a country where a lot remains to be done in terms of gender equality. The girls were left in orphanages that more or less became the places where they would die.

Following this documentary, France came to see me. She said that she had seen it on *Le Point* and that it made her cry. She and her spouse already had two children born in Quebec. They followed the procedures and, several months later, they went and adopted another child.

Our heart and our feelings often take precedence over monetary considerations. In this area, one may well say: "It will cost whatever it will cost, but I want to go oversea and bring back a child, regardless of the costs involved". The purpose of the bill is not to fully compensate those who make that decision.

I thank the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River, who pointed out that the Quebec government is a leader and provides some tax incentives. This shows that we do not only do bad things in Quebec. The minister responsible for northern Ontario, the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, said that this was ingrained in Quebec politics. He seemed to be implying that in Quebec we are a bunch of crooks, and that the sponsorship scandal that is tarnishing the government is par for the course.

That statement is utterly false. The hon. member even had to retract his remarks and apologize.

• (1745)

This is proof that, in the case of a number of social and fiscal laws in Quebec, we are at the forefront of several provinces of Canada. This is what makes Quebecers different, and this is what makes us different as a people and as a nation. I am pleased to hear this from my colleague of British Columbia.

We know that this bill is to amend the tax act to allow for the deduction of expenses of up to \$7,000 relating to international adoption. I want to reassure my colleague by telling him that we will be in favour of his bill. We agree with it, although it is a private member's bill, and all members should be able to vote with their conscience. I can tell you that I cannot speak for all my colleagues, but we already had the opportunity to debate this issue. I believe this bill will easily be supported by my colleagues, the Bloc Québécois members.

However, if I may make a suggestion, perhaps it would have been worthwhile to raise the \$7,000 limit to replace it instead with the real costs. It is true that financial data vary. However, the number of children adopted through international adoption is still minimal or not significant in Canada. Considering the fact that costs may easily reach \$20,000 or \$30,000, perhaps it would have been worthwhile to raise the amount. This is not a criticism that I want to make about my colleague's bill, but simply a constructive suggestion.

Even if I tell you that this phenomenon is still not yet widespread, it is growing. I had the opportunity to examine the statistics when I introduced my own bill. We realized that the phenomenon has been growing in the last 10 years in Quebec and Canada.

I was glad to see that 40% of all international adoptions in Canada are made in Quebec. There are statistics on this. What I am telling the House is based on the figures I have. Between 1993 and 2002, out of the 19,600 international adoptions in Canada, 8,100 were made in Quebec alone, that is, 41% of the 19,600 adoptions made between 1993 and 2002. A little over half of the children adopted by Quebecers come from Asia, 59.5% to be exact, and they come mainly from China.

I forgot to mention one thing. We may have colleagues in this House who have made an international adoption. I remember that one of our colleagues in the Bloc, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, adopted a girl named Rosalie from Thailand. This beautiful and adorable little girl does not seem to have any trouble getting used to the Quebec culture. I think she is giving a lot of satisfaction to her father, our hon. colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot who is well known for his fiery temper. Sometimes we ask him to think about Rosalie and it usually calms him down.

But who am I to talk about people with a fiery temper, I know I am not always easy to deal with. Since I have to drive back to Quebec City at the end of day, the House will understand why I want to tone it down a bit and not get so worked up.

As I was saying, 59.5% of these children came from Asia, and mainly from China, and were adopted by Quebecers.

• (1750)

Another 18.8% come from the Americas, and in particular Haiti. About the same proportion come from East Bloc countries, like Russia, Belarus and Romania.

I see that my time is almost up. I just want to add that probably all the members of the Bloc Québécois will wholeheartedly support this bill, as long as it is a free vote, especially since it was part of our platform in 2000.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to Bill C-246. It takes me back to my earlier period as a lawyer when I practised family law almost exclusively and handled a fair number of private adoptions during that period of time.

The NDP supports the bill that has been put forward. It is a further attempt by this legislature to acknowledge the role that adoption plays in Canada.

Adoption is a relatively new phenomena in the last 40 to 50 years. It is interesting to note when we look at the opinion polls that adoption has become highly accepted and has moved up toward the 80 percentile. We would not have found that 50 years ago. Adoption has become an accepted form of developing families in Canadian society.

Bill C-246 attempts to treat, in a tax advantage aspect, biological parents and adoptive parents in an equal fashion. It would recognize that there are different expenses and that society should subsidize those expenses, depending on how a child is brought into the family, whether biologically or by adoption. We provide medical benefits for mothers who are pregnant and we do not expect them to pay for those medicare services. Society subsidizes that family. Bill C-246 would do the same thing for adoptive parents.

I heard the comment from one of our Liberal colleagues about the number of adoptive parents who are adopting babies as opposed to adopting older children. They cannot have children biologically, but may have gone through great expense in their attempts to have biological children. They have already incurred a substantial amount of expense. The bill would assist them to start a family by providing them with some tax relief.

It is worth nothing that this tax relief is not only for those parents who are adopting babies. It would also extend to parents who are adopting family members such as nephews and nieces or maybe children of close friends who have died in some tragedy.

I am thinking of a case that came through my office recently involving friends of mine. There was an earthquake in Egypt and both parents were killed. There were three children in the family who were in their mid and late adolescence. The children happened to be visiting their grandmother in Egypt that day. Both parents were in the house when it collapsed. The grandmother was not capable of taking care of the children. The remaining family members living in Canada who were Canadian citizens were kind enough and responsible enough to take on that responsibility. However, this was a financial burden for them. They had three children of their own and instantly doubled their family in a very traumatic.

The type of tax relief provided in Bill C-246 would have certainly helped this family. It would not have resolved all of their financial difficulties, but it would have helped. I can repeat these kinds of stories.

These families reached out, oftentimes in a traumatic situation, and took on additional responsibility. That is something society should applaud. We should see what we can do to help them. This bill would go some distance to accomplishing that assistance.

• (1755)

I want to make another point. Speaking from my own experience, I can attest to how expensive adoption is, whether it is done inside

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Canada or outside Canada. I know how much the legal fees are; I know how much the legal process costs. I know what the home studies cost. Psychologists or social workers are brought in to assess the family in a home situation to determine whether it would be appropriate for the family to adopt a child. All of that costs money.

In addition, if the child is being adopted from outside the country, the adoptive parents will have expenses in the other country. Oftentimes they have very substantial travel and accommodation expenses when they move into the other country to pick up the child and bring the child back to Canada.

The \$7,000 deduction proposed under Bill C-246 is a very modest amount compared to what it costs most families, particularly for adoptions that take place outside Canada, especially overseas. The \$7,000 is a very small proportion, and is probably in the range of 25% to 35% of what it would actually cost a family to adopt a child.

I congratulate the member from the Conservative Party who has brought the bill forward at this time. It has been brought forward on other occasions and the legislature has not seen fit to adopt it into law. We hope we will see a different pattern as a result of his ongoing encouragement to the legislature to pass it into law.

• (1800)

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to rise on Bill C-246, proposed by my colleague from my part of the world, the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River.

I certainly share his sentiment. He wants a tax policy that would help Canadian families adopt children and which would recognize some of the big expenses incurred.

I come from a family of 12 children. We get together quite often. Every five years we have a huge reunion of several hundred people. It is a great time. My wife and I have four children and nine grandchildren. We have family events which we enjoy. In fact we were skiing last weekend at our little cabin. Something like 30 people were there and it was wonderful.

Some people cannot have a family because they have difficulty conceiving. The extra expenses involved in adopting children should be recognized. We want people to share the same joy in having a family that the rest of us do.

Many people adopt children even if they have their own. People do it for all kinds of reasons, for example, to help a child from a third world country who would not have the opportunity that the child would have here in Canada. I know couples who have gone to Russia and Kazakhstan to do exactly that and have incurred significant expenses.

We have to recognize that we want to share the joy of families with other members of society who are unable to have children. Because of the huge expenses involved in adoption, the bill put forward by my colleague today is an excellent piece of legislation. It recognizes that the family is the cornerstone of society, whether the children have come into the family through adoption or real birth. We need to encourage people to have children and to adopt them if necessary.

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Canada's demographics are changing, which is something that no one has talked about yet. With our aging population, 20 years from now there will be a huge problem. There will not be very many people to pay the bills. A lot of people will be retired. People are living longer and the birth rate is continuing to decline. The replacement for a couple right now is 1.2.

If it were not for immigration right now, Canada would be sliding backward. Unfortunately it will only get worse according to the projections for the next 20 years. Immigration will play a bigger part, which we welcome, but we will be competing for immigration. In western Europe the birth rate is even lower than it is in Canada. Countries there will be competing as well.

Why would we want restrictive policies that would discourage people from adopting, especially adopting outside the country where the expenses are the highest? I simply do not see it.

The parliamentary secretary said that we should not discriminate but in fact we discriminate already. The government's policies on taxation for families does exactly that. Single income families have an advantage over dual income families. In many cases one parent would like to stay at home and raise the children but the family may not have that option because both parents need to work. However, if two people are working in the family, they pay higher taxes than a single income earner. That should be corrected. It is a serious error which discourages families.

I am very much in support of my hon. friend's bill. He is suggesting that we recognize this important principle in law and give fair tax treatment to what people can write off for these adoption costs.

I know of one family where the parents have one child of their own and they recently adopted a child in Ukraine. They had to make a couple of trips to Ukraine. They had to stay there for quite a while as things do not work quite the same way that they do in Canada where procedures can be followed very carefully. When they went to Ukraine, they found that a lot of what they thought was in place in terms of rules and regulations were off the rails, so they had to start all over again. They had to incur extra expenses. The expenses can easily be in the \$40,000 to \$50,000 range. It finally resulted in their getting clearance to bring their daughter home.

• (1805)

Their daughter is a wonderful little child. She has been given an opportunity that she certainly would not have had otherwise. Some of the orphanages in the eastern bloc countries are in a deplorable condition. It has taken this poor little girl quite a while to adjust. I can just imagine what she went through in her life until she was two years old. Whether it will be a proven impact or not, I do not know, but I do know that she has loving parents who want her. They are giving her an opportunity that she probably would not have had otherwise.

My colleague also talked about foster parents and the fact that there are a lot of children that do not get the opportunity to be adopted even here in Canada. I think he talked about 20,000 people

or so that go through the foster parent system. I have a serious problem with that in that if there are people who would like to adopt those children but feel that they cannot because of the economics of it, the deduction would really help. Again it would provide a badly needed opportunity to children in the foster care system.

In many cases the children that go through foster parent homes end up in institutions like our jails. It is really sad. They feel unwanted and that becomes part of the reason that they rebel. I suggest there are a lot higher costs involved with that result than there would be with the \$7,000 deduction my friend is talking about in order to write off adoption expenses.

Let us adopt a family friendly policy. After all, the family is the cornerstone of our society.

My sister and her husband adopted a child many years ago and that child now has children of his own. They celebrate together. They are all one family. I know the rewards that they have reaped. My sister and her husband had three children afterward, but I have seen the rewards that they have reaped from having adopted their child.

The children are all the same. In fact, my children went to the same high school as my sister's and her husband's children, but they had not gone to the same school before that. We were in a parent-teacher interview one day when our oldest child was in high school and one of the teachers said, "Can I ever see that your daughter is Stephen's cousin. They are exactly the same". This was the adopted son of my sister.

Maybe it does work out that we become what our families are in mannerisms and many other ways, but that is the kind of fit we see in families with adopted children. In many cases they fit in perfectly and are wanted. This makes perfect sense.

The government and the parliamentary secretary talk about the need to make sure that we do not discriminate. We could start, as my colleague from Prince George—Peace River said, with this family friendly policy and see where it leads from there. I suggest that it also needs to pertain to the dual income family versus the single income family. That would be a big help as well. There are policies that are needed. Let us start with this one and see where it goes.

I am in full support of Bill C-246 and I hope it comes to fruition.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I realize there are only a couple of minutes left and I want to make a few comments.

First, I want to make it quite clear that I agree with a number of things the previous speaker said. I personally believe that the family is the foundation of our society. People in all levels of their lives need help from their families. They need the spiritual and physical help and that support. That is the glue that binds us together in a caring society. Therefore, we have to very carefully think about the best way to help strengthen the family in our society with our limited resources.

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I congratulate the member for bringing this bill forward for people who are somehow abandoned in society, who do not have homes and would have a better chance of finding a home through this method, a home through a cross-section of anyone in society, where it may be prohibitively expensive for some people to achieve this.

I would have to do more research on this because there are a number of things I do not know. I am sure the member who is proposing the bill will give me some facts. One area I am interested in is how many children in Canada who wish to be adopted are not adopted. My understanding is there is a lineup, and they all pretty well do find families.

Another benefit of this bill is that it helps support families with adoption in general. It helps Canada play an important role in the world. As members know, Canada is very well recognized in the world for many reasons and we are trying to enhance that even more. Of course we are much wealthier in a number of ways and are able to raise children. There are a number of children around the world who do not have the benefits that we have in place at this time.

If this method would make it more possible for a family in Canada to adopt a child from overseas, a child who has been abandoned, a child who would be raised without a health system, without proper nourishment, without proper clothes, without an education, then who could be against that under normal circumstances?

I may have missed this today, but one thing I am also interested in is the difference in expenses as compared to a natural-born child and an adoption, and the rationale in that respect. I am sure the member could help me privately.

The last area that I would also like to look at, as I research this bill further before making my final decision, is how our limited resources could go to the most needy. I am not sure if this bill is revenue-sensitive to the salaries of the families. If this is concentrated solely on less advantaged or disadvantaged families and kids, it would be more preferable. Therefore, our limited resources would go to those who needed it the most, not to families who could easily afford it.

• (1810)

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

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with deep disappointment that I find it necessary to question the response from the former president of the Treasury Board in the Chrétien cabinet, now the Minister of Industry, for the lack of accountability through the misuse of foundations.

As the opposition critic for science, research and technology, I share the deep disappointment that the research community has over the decision of the Prime Minister to eliminate the minister of science, research and development from his cabinet.

A science adviser who reports to the Prime Minister is not the same as a cabinet minister who reports to Parliament. It has to make one wonder why the Governor General dropped any references to science, research and development in the throne speech, and whether that dropping was deliberate.

In the section of the throne speech, which the Governor General refused to read, the government claimed that \$13 billion had gone into basic research since 1997. That is very misleading because much of these funds has flowed to non-accountable foundations. In fact the Auditor General testified to the public accounts committee that \$7.4 billion had flowed to foundations since 1997, as at March 31, 2002. Almost all those funds were sitting somewhere in bank accounts and investments of some sort.

The policy of the government to recognize transfers as expenditures, when money flows to foundations, misrepresents what is actually being spent. It is not actually being paid to researchers and scientists who are counting on these funds to do the basic science. It could be years before these scientists see any funds at all, if any money is left, and not in the pocket of some Liberal-friendly agency.

The decision to park billions of dollars beyond the reach of Parliament in non-accountable foundations and then have cabinet approve in principle, without the money, for things like the \$500 million proposal for the Canadian neutron facility is an example of our scientists having to spend their time chasing money rather than doing the science.

Parliament has a primary responsibility to scrutinize public spending. While the Prime Minister has recently stated publicly that parliamentarians should have the ability to question every line of spending, as finance minister in the Chrétien cabinet, the Prime Minister created a series of foundations. They were created in such a way as to avoid the scrutiny of Parliament and the Auditor General.

We are talking about mountains of taxpayer dollars. Since 1997 the finance minister, now Prime Minister, transferred more than \$7.4 billion to 10 foundations, and this money came directly from the \$20 billion that was slashed from health care back when he was trying to balance the budget.

It is interesting to note that these foundations were created at the same time the government was setting up its \$250 million slush fund, which we now know as the federal government sponsorship program. They were also created at the same time the deputy prime minister was funnelling hundreds of millions of dollars into the thoroughly discredited gun registry.

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Concerns about the continuing use of foundations by the federal government as a means to avoid the effective ministerial oversight and parliamentary scrutiny have been continually raised by the Auditor General, and she has even put out a report entitled: "Placing the Public's Money beyond Parliament's Reach".

• (1815)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can say from my time in policy meetings with the Prime Minister that the exact opposite is the case. He is very interested in emphasizing science and technology and in fact it is a central theme of the throne speech.

The hon. member has missed the point of the reorganization of the science responsibilities for the government. We made it abundantly clear in the announcement of the new ministry and in the Speech from the Throne that we place a strong value on science and technology as foundations for the 21st century economy.

The Minister of Industry has the mandate and responsibility for science in Canada. This responsibility has clearly been vested in the Minister of Industry since the passage of the Department of Industry Act in 1995. The function has neither been eliminated nor downgraded.

Yes, the position of Secretary of State for Science, Research and Development has been eliminated in the new government structure. However, we will be able to draw on not one but two new sources of support and advice. The hon. member for London North Centre has been appointed to the new position of Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister with special emphasis on Science and Small Business. Dr. Arthur Carty, currently President of the National Research Council and a distinguished chemist in his own right, has been appointed national science adviser.

The Prime Minister's creation of a parliamentary secretary to advise him directly on science and small business issues shows clearly that these issues will be held in high regard at the highest levels of this government. In his new position, the parliamentary secretary will not only be able to support the Prime Minister directly on science and technology issues but will provide his perspectives to cabinet, as appropriate.

The Prime Minister's personal interest in this area is further emphasized by the appointment of Dr. Carty. In creating this position we have provided ourselves with the opportunity to harness the great science and technology potential in Canada and help build a stronger science culture in this country. The national science adviser will provide sound expert advice on a full range of issues related to research and the impact of science considerations on public policy.

He will work closely with the Advisory Council on Science and Technology and others to help our government identify science and technology priorities and directions. The national science adviser will also work with Canada's research community to apply the benefits of our research and development to the challenges faced by the developing world.

It is clear that the national science adviser will play an important role for our government. He could serve as a champion to help build and enhance science and technology collaboration across govern-

ment, industry and academia and to access knowledge resulting from the global science and technology capacity. He could also harness a collective knowledge in this country to identify and assess future science based opportunities and risks that Canada may face in the coming years.

The national science adviser will undoubtedly play a key role, too, in mapping out a plan to deliver on one of our government's key science and technology priorities: ensuring that our knowledge investment is converted to commercial success and growing small and medium-sized firms that can benefit from science and research. In this regard, he will work closely with the parliamentary secretary for science and small business.

• (1820)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, after the public accounts committee issued its report calling on the government to clean up its act, Canadians are still waiting for the changes as recommended by the Auditor General and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The public is in no mood for another gun registry or sponsorship boondoggle.

It stretches the credibility of the former finance minister and now Prime Minister to claim ignorance about the problems with the sponsorship program when my parliamentary colleague more than a year ago in the public accounts committee drew the connection between the unaccounted funds with the Liberal ad firm Groupaction and foundations. As the member pointed out, we have no way of knowing who benefits from these foundations, whether they are friends of the Prime Minister or former party members.

It would appear that Parliament and the Auditor General were purposely excluded from holding these foundations accountable. The sponsorship scandal has put an entire cloud over government programs and it is up to the government to remove that cloud by bringing accountability to these foundations.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what that has to do with science and technology.

It is interesting how the members opposite spend half the day going after us for having too much control over programs. Then, when we set them apart from government, so that we are not in control, they complain about that too.

[*Translation*]

I wish to reiterate that our government views science and technology as critical foundations for Canada's future.

Since 1997, we have invested over \$13 billion on research and innovation. The Minister of Industry has responsibility, and I am quoting the Act establishing the Department, for science and technology in Canada, to encourage the fullest and most efficient and effective development and use of science and technology and for fostering and promoting science and technology in Canada and is keenly involved in ensuring that these monies are well spent.

Adjournment Debate

This government remains deeply committed to science and technology issues. They form a key part of our mandate. Working closely with the Prime Minister, members of this House, the Parliamentary Secretary and the National Science Advisor, we will continue to work to ensure that Canada's science and technology efforts benefit all Canadians and provide a strong foundation for the economy of the future.

[English]

FIREARMS PROGRAM

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, February 9, 2004, I asked the government, for the 22nd time, "How much is the gun registry going to fully cost to implement and how much will it cost to maintain?"

For the 22nd time, the minister in charge of the firearms fiasco failed to answer the question.

I specifically asked, "The Firearms Act has already cost taxpayers \$1 billion. Taxpayers want to know, when will it become \$2 billion?"

Instead of answering the question, the Deputy Prime Minister defied the conclusions reached by the Auditor General in her December 2002 report and the financial reports released by the minister's own department. The minister said that she had been absolutely clear year after year about the cost of the firearms program.

That is simply not true. If she was being absolutely clear, why did the Auditor General make the following statement in paragraph 10.1 and 10.3 in her December 2002 report on the firearms fiasco? It says:

10.1 The Department of Justice Canada did not provide Parliament with sufficient information to allow it to effectively scrutinize the Canadian Firearms Program and ensure accountability. It provided insufficient financial information and explanations for the dramatic increase in the cost of the Program.

10.3 In 2000, the Department of Justice estimated that by 2004-05 it would spend at least \$1 billion on the Program and collect \$140 million in fees after refunds. This amount does not include all financial impacts on the government. The Department also did not report to Parliament on the wider costs of the Program as required by the government's regulatory policy.

That is what the Auditor General had to say. It is absolutely clear. Do we doubt her word?

Did the minister not remember that she was in charge of this firearms fiasco in 2000? Why did the minister force members of Parliament to wait two years before this information was provided to them? Why did we have to get it from the Auditor General and not from the minister?

The minister was the very person keeping Parliament in the dark then and she's doing it again now. The more things change, the more they seem to stay the same.

Here are some additional gun costs that have been uncovered through 430 access to information requests that I have submitted and some excellent research done by the parliamentary research branch.

Here are some additional costs to the \$1 billion already noted: enforcement costs, \$1 billion; compliance costs could be anywhere from \$367 million to \$764 million; privatization costs, \$371 million; and economic costs are still a cabinet secret we are told.

The cost benefit analysis is still a cabinet secret, hidden by the present Prime Minister. There are indirect costs still unknown for the following departments: Treasury Board, Foreign Affairs, Environment, Canadian Wildlife Service, Fisheries and Oceans, Natural Resources, National Defence, Parks Canada, Correctional Service Canada and the Canadian War Museum because this information was left out of the Liberal's performance report on the firearms program presented on October 31, 2003.

The government has failed to disclose these costs to Parliament or to the public. Consequently, the cover-up on the true costs of the gun registry continues.

For the 23rd time, I ask the Liberal government to tell us the truth. How much will the gun registry cost to fully implement and how much will it cost to maintain?

• (1825)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the majority of Canadians support effective gun control, but more specifically to the hon. member's question, the firearms program has not cost \$2 billion. In fact, it has not even cost \$1 billion. The \$1 billion figure is the projected cost of the program at the end of 2004-05.

As of March 31, 2003, the full cost of the program was \$815 million as reported in the 2002-03 Department of Justice's performance report. This number includes the information technology costs and the reimbursements to the provinces and the federal partners, such as the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency. This total also includes all the supplementary estimates that were approved by Parliament.

The money that has been invested in the Canada Firearms Centre's information technology system, including its development and operation over the last seven years, has created a system that works. The information technology system has been operational since 1998, the date the law came into effect. The system has been used successfully to licence two million firearm owners and to register almost seven million firearms.

In spite of the hon. member's theories about cover up, let me be clear. The total projected expenditure relating to the program for the fiscal year 2003-04 is approximately \$133 million. This amount represents \$116 million for the Canada Firearms Centre and an estimated \$17 million identified by our other federal partners. All these moneys were approved by Parliament. I can assure the member that the program continues to focus on efficient and cost effective operations.

Police across Canada are making daily use of the Canadian firearms information system for crime prevention and for investigating firearms related crime and smuggling. All illegal firearms begin as legal firearms. Canada cannot combat illegal firearms without an effective system to control legal firearms.

Adjournment Debate

•(1830)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I could spend 10 minutes rebutting much of the information just given. I do not want to mock the member, but yesterday they admitted to over \$120 million more than she gave in the answer today.

The government does not know from one day to the next what the answer will be. It has complete disregard for Parliament. It does not give us accurate information.

It was clear, and I made it clear in a statement earlier today, that the \$2 billion that has been spent and is projected to be spent on this program has already been documented by Radio Canada, the CBC. For them to deny this without even asking Radio Canada where it got its numbers and how it did that, is irresponsible.

I am upset that they continue to claim that the system works. Not one charge has been laid under the Firearms Act and they claim it is a success. Smuggling and illegal firearms are on the increase. Everything this member has said is virtually false.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that we do not get our figures from the media. In fact, we get our figures from the 2002-03 Department of Justice performance report. We get it from exactly where it should come.

Canadians have made it clear that they want a firearms program that improves public safety. The total investment in the program has not reached \$1 billion. I repeat, as of March 31, 2003, the full cost of the program was at \$840 million.

Poll after poll has shown that Canadians want firearm owners to be licensed and firearms to be registered. The program is working. Two million firearm owners have been licensed and seven million firearms have been registered.

This is also a preventive program and police from across Canada are making daily use of the information from this program in order to prevent crime and to investigate firearms related smuggling.

I just want to say one thing, and I cannot say it often enough—

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

The House adjourned at 6:32 p.m.

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